

Interview: Ken Isomura

Interviewer: Patricia Wejr (PW)

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Transcription: Donna Sacuta/Patricia Wejr

PW [00:00:00] The early days and how you first started working in the forestry industry.

KI [00:00:08] Well, as you know, my history is Japanese. I knew nothing about the relocation but after I came down here my uncle taught me, or I learned a lot. But anyway I grew up in Revelstoke.

KI [00:00:35] I suffered somewhat from bigotry. Not that much actually, surprisingly little. And it was a very nice town to grow up in. And my mother was a nurse but she couldn't practice until after 1950. In 1951 she went to work in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Revelstoke and I think she must have delivered about two-thirds of the kids after that because she specialized in the small children. And anyway, when I had to find work I figured I'd go to work for the CPR just like most of the people in Revelstoke but there was this guy that worked in the woods. His name was Arnold Vigue. He was a foreman for Celgar and my mum delivered three of his kids. And so when he heard that I was looking for work, he approached me and asked me if I want to come and work for him in the woods. And so I said yeah.

PW [00:02:02] Could I just ask you how old were you then?

KI [00:02:03] Seventeen. And so that's how I started with Celgar. And they were, it was... We used to have to find our way to the marshalling point which is twenty-four miles south of Revelstoke on this old dirt road, you called it the South Road. And that was a road out of Revelstoke. You had crossed two river ferries and you used to have to go to start at four o'clock in the morning to get to work for 7:30. So anyway, so we got...

PW [00:02:49] So the marshalling point is where you'd get picked up?

KI [00:02:53] Where the crummy was. Where the crew bus was, and they'd pick you up and take you out to wherever you were going. Because we had about three different, three or four different logging crews going in any different, any specific time and depending on which crew you were with, then depended on where you went. Anyway there's a lot of Polish loggers that came over during the war and they ended up working for Celgar. And so I got to know guys like John Augustine and Walter [Sornyk], and Bill Wosniak. They're all Polish and...

PW [00:03:45] Did you learn some Polish as well?

KI [00:03:47] Just swear words. And I've forgotten them. But it was quite an education. And so there was very little... One of the other guys that was working there was also Japanese but he was with another crew and he said his crew they were quite... he ran into a lot of prejudice and the only thing was my size. I was short. And I didn't know a hell of a lot but... So you had to be smarter.

PW [00:04:30] How did they deal with that then. So were you were you partnered with someone? How did you learn? You just figured it out?

KI [00:04:37] Yep. Well you'd learn, at least with Celgar one of the things that they had was a buddy system that you knew if you had any questions you asked your buddy. And so that's basically what I learned. But basically, you learned on the job as you worked and there's a lot of young guys that came out there that injured themselves and then they ended up leaving. Because lack of supervision but it just wasn't part of the culture of the company. So anyway I started out at the bottom as a buckler on the landing and...

PW [00:05:27] Maybe just because not everybody will know what that is, can you describe what a buckler did?

KI [00:05:34] A buckler is, like you've got the cats and stuff that skid, bring all the product to the landing. So it's a central point where you... As a buckler my job was to help the scaler measure the log and then we cut it to length. Like the ideal lengths were increments of 8 so you had 8, 16, 32... 24, 32 up to 48 foot logs.

PW [00:06:13] Those are pretty big logs in those days, too, weren't they?

KI [00:06:16] Well not in the Interior. The biggest you'd get would be about two feet round, maybe give or take a few inches, but....

PW [00:06:27] You had to be pretty handy with the chainsaw though.

KI [00:06:30] Yeah. You learn very quickly how to use one and the tricks of using one. And my biggest problem was sharpening the god damn things. Like you have to sharpen at a angle and they've got a thing for the spacers that determine the cut or the amount of wood that each tooth takes.

PW [00:07:00] Did you have to do that with a little file?

KI [00:07:02] Yeah, well they have a thing that fit right over the chain and it had the depth thing and every once in a while we'd lose it and I'd have to do it by eye and by hand and I used to make a mess of chains all the time.

PW [00:07:25] I'm looking at your hands, you've got all your fingers though.

KI [00:07:30] That's -- the only time you cut your fingers is around a saw, a big saw, like with the...

PW [00:07:48] In the mills you mean?

KI [00:07:48] Yeah, in the mill. But chainsaws, I guess there was a few people that cut pieces of their hand or their foot and so forth. But like I said I had to work smart because of my size. So I learned very quickly that of ways how you do things properly. But anyway, from there I worked from buckler and then went hooking chokers, which is working with the cats. And chokers are chunks of iron cable and I can't explain... They've got a bell and a thing that you fit the thing in and then the cable tightens around the log and they pull it out. And then from there, from choking I went to running a cat, skidding and they brought a couple of -- while I was still working they brought this new technology, skidders which would pull probably about, were about half the power of the cat and would take, would

drag, because they lifted it at the end of a log up, would skid twice as much wood. But the only thing with them is that they were rubber tired and they wouldn't go places that the cat would. I remember working on side hills at about 7 degree slope. I remember sliding about I guess 140 feet down the hill sideways. Because you'd run into an unstable ground with a cat and all of a sudden the cat would take off going sideways. But I guess then I went from skidding to loading and which was a cat with forks on and loading trucks and things like that. And then from there I decided you'd make...the fallers were the highest paid ones in the bush so I decided I needed to be a faller. So I went -- and that was one thing about Celgar, is that they had no problem, they kept promoting if you showed an interest. So I got to be a, tried to be a faller. So that was, it's a dangerous job.

PW [00:11:05] It's very dangerous, yeah.

KI [00:11:06] I had about two or three close calls as a faller.

PW [00:11:13] That's why they're named the widow-makers, right?

KI [00:11:13] Yeah, yeah, the log splits in half while they're falling it and stuff like that happens. And my closest call I guess was when I was hooking chokers. I got -- one of the trees I hooked up was caught behind a stump and the cat was winching 'em in. And the thing gave way, slid over top of the thing and came swinging around and it caught me right across the back of the shoulders and drove me face down into the, thank god it was moss and stuff there. But that was probably my closest call. I thought I'd broken things but was just badly bruised across shoulders. But that was the closest.

PW [00:12:08] So how long all altogether did you work for Celgar?

KI [00:12:12] I worked for Celgar as a whole I worked from 1962 til 1970 and I left. I went but the last three years I worked in the office. They had this thing where they're promoting people into different types of jobs and so you showed an interest and you wrote an exam and then they gave you a position down at the head office down in Nakusp. And they gave me a job because I was, I guess I showed an aptitude I guess for numbers and so they gave me a job in the scaling department down in Nakusp. And I worked there from about '66 til 1970.

PW [00:13:11] Can you describe for us what that would entail, what a scaler would do?

KI [00:13:16] A scaler goes and measures the volume of the logs and what he does, he's gotta -- well there's scaler's sticks, it's got a slight hook or a hook about four inches long on the end of it and there's this thing's three and a half feet long. Well I guess it would be closer to four. And you'd take the measurement of the log. You measure the diameter and then you just walk down and every length of the stick and then you record all that.

PW [00:13:59] So they basically submitted to you and you had to look at them and...

KI [00:14:03] Then I compiled, they did these sheets for each load of logs that went out. Well then they bundled the logs per truckload with these steel bands and they'd put them in the river and they had their river drive and they brought the logs down. We took the logs all the way from up the Columbia which is around Revelstoke or north to Golden. And we went from Revelstoke to 100 Mile, which is 100 mile up the bend. And they drove the logs from there, they put them in the bundles and then they went all the way to Castlegar which was in the Columbia, the Arrow Lakes and then the Columbia again to Castlegar where

the pulp mill and the sawmill was. And so anyway the scalers would measure the logs and the volume of every log that went into every load for every truck.

KI [00:15:30] So then they put in each truck load, they entered all the logs, the volume of the logs, all on this sheet. And each sheet they put a truck, Micky Olsen's truck would have so many cubic cunits on it and then they'd bring, once a week they'd bring all the sheets that they'd loaded down to us, would come down to me at Nakusp and I would have to add the total up and we would submit that to the Forest Service for stumpage and royalty. And so that was my job for four years.

PW [00:16:22] So I just was wondering about what your relationship was like with the employer was it a unionized...?

KI [00:16:29] Yeah, it was unionized but it was a good relationship then. Within five years of my leaving the woods, it deteriorated. It was over 300 guys working in the woods when I went down to the office and a year, two years after I left my job which was 1972, I went back to Nakusp, there was three guys working for them and the rest were all contractors. But most of the guys working with contractors were former union guys so they had a pretty easy job to organize.

PW [00:17:22] Oh so they... yeah I get it. So it was IWA before and they tried to contract everything out, like they do.

KI [00:17:29] Yeah, how should I put this? It seemed to me they didn't really want to go with contractors. They would rather have had their own control of their own employees and all the stuff that goes along with it. But everybody else in the industry was going contract and so Celgar as well, finally went contract.

PW [00:18:09] I'm not familiar with Celgar, were they BC based?

KI [00:18:13] They're connected to Celanese Corporation. We did a, the union did a trace on where Celgar went, and there was about five companies that they were part of. And it ended up as Celanese Corporation. And uh ...

PW [00:18:43] So I assume it was a decision made on high, to do that. Because everybody knew everybody right, in a small town like that. So if you had an issue how would you deal with it at the time?

KI [00:18:57] Well, we talked to Ron Jordan in the pub. He was a bit -- he was the woods manager and so he was boss of everything to do with the woods. And so if you had an issue, you'd approach him when you are having a beer on Friday night. So, 'by the way, Ron, did you know that such and such a cat was running with a hydraulic leak in the thing. And we've had it back in the shop for a week and a half now and those guys won't fix the goddamn thing.' So pretty soon, within three days there was usually a fix. So that was basically how we resolved things. And Arnold Vigue and Bill West and all of the managers went drinkin' with us on the Friday night. Because we all went for a beer on Friday. I was underage, but the guy, the bartender kind of looked the other way because he knew if he cut me off the rest of the guys would go too.

PW [00:20:26] Because the age was 21, wasn't it?

KI [00:20:27] Yeah. But no, that was a quick and easy way of resolving problems. Same as a lot of grievances got solved that way too. And we had a good president of our sub-local like we're a sub-local from Salmon Arm or from Kamloops. We're the southernmost local part of that local. The rest, the guys in Castlegar were all part of the Cranbrook local. But we were part of Kamloops local. And I didn't know it at the time, but I was learning a lot from our president. He was a very pragmatic guy that like if you had a grievance and it wasn't -- how would you say -- a good grievance, he'd tell you and he would either take it or else lose it. And lots of times he just lost, told you he was losing it and then lost the grievance.

PW [00:21:53] Now I was curious though I can't recall reading about this but did the union really try to fight the contracting out?

KI [00:22:02] Well they did it, they started this contracting out stuff on the Coast, because we -- I remember at a convention a couple of years before I left, I was at a convention and that was the main topic of debate about getting off our ass and fighting this contracting out, it's going to be an issue, a problem for us and so forth. And sure enough it became a problem and frankly, I think the union was unprepared for it. And so the companies basically de-unionized by contractors.

PW [00:22:52] So were you a shop steward at the time?

KI [00:22:54] I became the secretary-treasurer of our sub-local at the time, but it was the fact that I was good handling with numbers more than my -- what would you say -- more than my principles or ideals. 'Cause my background had nothing to do with any unions previous to starting in the woods. And in fact I was a dyed-in-the-wool Conservative, as a kid. But that was my rebellion because my grandfather and my uncles were all CCFers. And so I became a Conservative just as a form of rebellion. But I discovered that their ideals didn't exactly match what I thought was right. So I gradually shifted over and I guess, well, I was back in Revelstoke by then, yes. I think that must have been about 1969, I finally became left-wing, or communist as my friend in Revelstoke would say. Goddamn "Ken the Commie" he used to call me.

PW [00:24:33] Yeah just because you were union...

KI [00:24:37] No, I was NDP, so I was a commie.

PW [00:24:42] So after you'd worked that long there then what led you to decide to leave Revelstoke and come down to the Coast?

KI [00:24:49] No, I left Nakusp.

PW [00:24:49] Oh Nakusp, right, because you were working in the office.

KI [00:24:49] Yeah, I started working in Nakusp, and brought my mum down too. And so we lived in Nakusp for three or four years, but it was a nice little town, too. But I think it was more the lack of eligible young women than anything else.

PW [00:25:21] It's not very big is it?

KI [00:25:21] No, the only single women that you knew were either teachers and they were snapped up by the RCMP-ers or the bankers. So for us poor old loggers there wasn't a hell of a lot left.

PW [00:25:41] So did you come on your own down?

KI [00:25:44] No my buddy and I came down. He came down early 'cause I stopped, I went back to Revelstoke after I quit and I'll have to tell you the story of my quitting too. My boss was generally pretty good but he was pretty hard-nosed about getting our work done. And this one beautiful day like today I was sitting in the office and our office windows overlooked the lake and it was a windy day and the wind was blowing from the south. And so I was watching this tugboat tow a boom of bundles of trees, of logs. And he'd go past the point and the wind would blow him back out. And he'd have to move back within the shelter of the point. And he kept on doing this and so I was watching him and seeing how long it would take then for him to finally clear the point. And my boss caught me watching, sitting there watching it and he had this big pile of paperwork. And he says I want that finished and on my desk by quitting time today. And I said, 'yeah, yeah okay Ron.' And so he did that twice. And I don't know why but for some reason, between the beautiful weather outside which I was wishing I was back out there and he just rubbed me this wrong way when he said, came back and told me this again. And I think once would have been enough, once was enough for me and then you know, I'd have probably went back to work and did it. But for him to come back a second time and say that to me again I thought was redundant and it pissed me off. So I sat there and stewed for about half an hour then I got up and I picked up the pile of paperwork that I hadn't done and went into his office and threw the papers down on his desk, in a pile, it was quite neat. So, and said, 'I quit' and I left. I sort of regretted it and while I was down there I almost took an RIA course by correspondence and I was about two papers away from finishing it and never did finish.

PW [00:28:44] Can you tell us what that stands for?

KI [00:28:46] Registered Industrial Accountancy. So anyway. So that was it.

PW [00:28:54] You weren't very old though, were you?

KI [00:28:55] I was 27 when I came back. But, no twenty... How old was I? I was 17 when I went into the woods in '62, in '70, yeah, so eight years.

PW [00:29:14] So you were maybe only 25.

KI [00:29:16] Yeah. And then...

PW [00:29:20] By the way did the guy ever make it on the lake, with the...?

KI [00:29:23] Well actually he did make it. The wind died down and he... But well we had some great fun down there. There's like we had the crazy bush pilot, Roger that worked for us. We had a plane that the executives used for travelling back and forth to the Coast and whatever. And so we had this crazy French Canadian bush pilot. And, I'll never forget him. I was afraid to fly with him 'cause he was so crazy in the head, but he was a good pilot. But there was ... I learned a lot working for them because they had... it was like, they owned the whole TFL 23 which is the whole Columbia River river-shed, right down to Castlegar. And they basically owned it and they, you know, there was a lease from the government but we were responsible for everything from roads to firefighting and so we did it all.

PW [00:30:49] Did you have to fight fires sometimes?

KI [00:30:50] Oh yeah, oh yeah. Every summer. They pulled us logging crews, we were the first guys to go. They had a small group of core firefighters but they did silly things like inventory and stuff like that and it was basically make-work for them in the winter. And fought fires, and then they did most of our training of firefighting in the summer. So every summer we'd have to take two weeks off and go get our firefighting training. I fought, I forget how many. I kept track of how many fires I fought. There was over a dozen anyway while I was there. And learned how to run a cat, and powersaw, fall trees. Basically learned to be a jack of all trades, master of none.

PW [00:32:12] So it must have been quite different when you came down to the Lower Mainland then?

KI [00:32:16] Well I came down here and actually in those days there's lots of jobs available. And so we tried all over the place and actually I ended up with a job at the pole yard because my buddy Butch he applied, same as I did, but he was down here for a couple of months before me. And so anyway he got a job. They called, and his application came up for the CPR out in Coquitlam and then the job for the pole yard, and we were familiar with the CPR stuff because we'd work there in the summers and stuff like that going to school. And so he thought he'd go and get on the CPR. So he said do you want to try and see if these guys want you? So I said sure. So I went down and I was interviewed by Don Stuart and he said 'when can you start?' And I said, 'if you give me time to go home and get my cork boots and hardhat and I can start today'. So he said fine. So that's how I started. But back to before I came down I was going to...Butch and I had planned you know that sometime we'd come down to Vancouver. And so when I quit my job I went back to Revelstoke and he was working as a timber cruiser for a private contractor.

KI [00:34:13] And so anyway, I came back and I said to him, 'I quit my job so we can go to the coast.' So he said, 'OK fine'. So he quit his job and we got ready in a couple of... we were planning to leave on the Saturday and it was a Wednesday. And on Thursday there was a guy in Revelstoke, this Doug Hamilton and he ran a Texaco service station. He got diagnosed with cancer and I was very good friends with a guy that ran the Sally Ann's Cafe. And this Doug Hamilton was also, he knew Barney. And he was relatively new to town too and so he asked Barney if he knew anybody that can fill in for him while he was gone. Because if you left your business those days and you are gone for any length of time, you never got back your business again. So anyway, so he asked Ron if he knew anybody that would run the service station for him. And I'd worked a little bit in the summertime while I was going to school for a couple of service stations in the area. So Barney said, 'yeah I know somebody but I don't know whether he'd take it'. So he came to me and he asked me if I would do it for this, for Doug and I didn't know Doug well, but sort of knew him, I knew he was a nice guy and so forth. So I took over running the service station and meantime Butch was going to go so I said, 'okay you go ahead and when this...when I finish this thing for Doug I'll come down and join you'. So, I ran the service station for I guess about four months while Doug was in treatment.

KI [00:36:26] And that was an education as well because I mean I had to do everything, like bookwork every night and keep track of the inventory and all this stuff. And anyway we did quite well while he was gone. So he was joking in a couple months, when he contacted me after a couple of months after he'd come back and he says, 'shit, you want to come back and work for me, we did way better with me gone than when I'm here'. But probably

the difference was is I knew everybody in town because of my Mum, and everybody liked me because of my Mum, and so naturally they would come and patronize whatever I was doing. So anyway that was more of the reason why I was, did a good job for him. And so then we came down here and as I say I went home and got my hard hat and cork boots and came back and started working. And again, talk about deja vu. I ended...I started out as a buckler on the landing.[laughter] Where they cut the poles, where they peel them and then they cut the poles to length. And poles had to be very specific lengths.

PW [00:38:09] So on that, what was the company that owned it?

KI [00:38:12] MacMillan Bloedel. And when I first started with them they had a very patriarchal kind of an attitude. If you went to work for them, you know, they considered you an employee for life and you were, I mean and...

PW [00:38:31] So is that what happened with you? Is that your entire [unclear]

KI [00:38:33] No, they started out that way but then the lawyers and the accountants took over the company as the old guys left and they ruined the management of the company. It became -- they ran it like a business. It was no longer a family-owned kind of a business. It was a business. And so they did all the good business practice things. But, the soul I guess went out of the company as each old guy left. And a lot of the -- they didn't, they no longer promoted any of the guys from different divisions, from logging divisions and stuff like that into head office. They became all outside hires.

PW [00:39:42] People that didn't really know...

KI [00:39:43] Yeah, they didn't know.

PW [00:39:45] From the ground up, how it ran.

KI [00:39:46] Yeah. Yeah. So. Let's see.

PW [00:39:54] So what was the health and safety like at that place?

KI [00:39:58] It wasn't bad to begin with but as the soul went out of the business, so did the health and safety and everything else. The employee relations, everything all kind of went out the window. And that was when I started the health and safety part of it. I discovered I was running into a stone wall because unlike Ron Jordan, I mean I could go out for a beer with Ron but Ron couldn't do anything. He didn't have the final say. And so I said, 'how do I get to these guys?' And the only way out, to get to them, was the job action and that was with the union.

PW [00:40:50] So did you become a shop steward?

KI [00:40:53] I became a safety steward in the union and our...the shop steward's job there became a 'nobody else wants it' therefore whoever will take it, gets it. So eventually I became a shop steward simply by default. And so then I became the plant chair and so forth and became involved at the Local. And it was interesting because when I came down from Revelstoke I was looking for -- I guess the part that was missing in my life, was that sense of community you have in a small town. And I was looking for it and I couldn't find it anywhere. And I found it in two places. One was the United Way and one was with the union. And so that more than anything convinced me to get active.

PW [00:42:17] Where was that pole yard?

KI [00:42:17] Down in Annacis. It's Port Royal, that development now. They sold it in '88. We went...the final straw for them, that pole yard, was 1986. They did a -- well they did it every year -- but 1986 was the last one I knew of. And they did all, an audit of all the divisions and we went from the highest return on the dollar in 1986 or '85 to the lowest return on the dollar in 1986. And all they did, they made us account for the inventory we were carrying in pole. And so with a stroke of the pen we became...

PW [00:43:24] This was an accounting change.

KI [00:43:27] Yes. And so when they discovered, and at the same time they were looking at downsizing and so they looked at two -- they were going to cut two divisions. So they took the most inefficient one which was over on the Island and us, which was the least money they were making. It wasn't that we weren't making any money, we were making the least amount because of this accounting change. And so that was it. But by then I was part of the Local and I was elected as Financial Secretary in '88.

PW [00:44:21] So that was a full-time position?

KI [00:44:23] Yeah. And as I became active with the union, the United Way was... the person in the pole yard was the guy that was...the least...the junior guy ended up being the canvas, on the job canvasser. And I was the junior guy in the seniority list and so I got this job as canvassing for United Way. And I didn't know what United Way was. And so they did a quick and down and dirty education on me and one of the things that Mac and Blo did, they gave me time off to go and learn about United Way. So the first year I was their on the job canvasser, we had two donations, one from Don Stewart the superintendent in the yard and me, because they told me that the canvasser has to be the first to donate. And so that was my responsibility and I ended up with two people that donated, so that pissed me off. So I was determined that the next - so year I volunteered and I made it my mission in life that I was going to get a significant donation next year. So the next year, I took advantage of all the -- M & B let you go on the agency tours and stuff like this -- so I took advantage of every one that came up, came down the pike and I ended up with four donations the following year and within by.... I guess by 1976, we were Gold Award which is 80 percent, and the measure that they had was a day's pay per year. And so what they, I ended up with 80 in '80. So that was pretty good.

PW [00:47:13] So what was it, how did you sell it?

KI [00:47:16] I didn't. I strong-armed people [laughter]. Well, I didn't strong-arm them because I was too little, too small. I went to guys and I said, 'you know the next grievance you have, you could lose it very easily' [laughs]. Things like that. So I used peer pressure more or less. But I mean it, the record stayed after I left so I was happy for that. But in the meantime, I was learning about United Way and here was my sense of community, stuff that I used to do as a matter of course every day in a small town. Well here we were so organized and I thought that was quite neat. So I became involved, and about the time I was working down there too, there was a change in the local union. A new slate of officers came in. There was Stoney and those guys and Stoney was the second major influence in my life. He was a short guy and ah, but he was very smart.

PW [00:48:42] Gerry Stoney.

KI [00:48:43] Yeah. So I decided whatever I did at the union, I was going to pattern myself -- I remembered Art Kelly being very pragmatic, and Art and Stoney I thought would be good role models for me.

PW [00:49:03] Rather than Jack?

KI [00:49:03] Well I couldn't be Jack, he was too big and too larger than life. There's no way that I could be Jack, or anybody could be Jack for that matter. The guy that he took over from though was, what's his name? See, I don't remember.

PW [00:49:22] I can't remember.

KI [00:49:24] But you remember Jack Munro, right?

PW [00:49:26] Oh yeah. But I do remember remember Gerry Stoney, too.

KI [00:49:31] Yeah.

PW [00:49:36] Now we'll have to do some research after.

KI [00:49:39] Well I can see him plain as day. It's just that I can't remember his name. That's happened to me since my stroke. Some things I remember, some things I don't. I just, there's no selectivity about it. But anyway.

PW [00:50:01] So you were, on at the same time that you were on the executive you were also [unclear].

KI [00:50:07] I was getting, yeah, parallely involved. And Gerry encouraged members to be involved in other things. Like he became part of the Fraser River Estuary Committee. And he had all kinds of community things that he appointed people from our union to be part of. And so he chose me I guess to be his social service guy, put me into the United Way position. But Terry Smith after Gerry left, he continued on with this thing. And when they wanted a loaned rep at the United Way, he decided to kick me off, and Mac Blo was also very supportive of doing United Way, so they had no problem giving me the time off to become a loaned rep. So I started out as loaned rep so I learned more and more and more about the United Way and that became... what I called Joy's first generation of volunteers, and Joy Langan became Labour Director there. And she went and used her leverage I guess with a lot of these people. And so she had an idea and as a loaned rep I was in and out of the office quite a bit. And even when I wasn't a loaned rep, I used to go in there and sit down with Joy and Jackie which was... she was another person that influenced my perspective or whatever you want to call it. And so anyway, I said, one of the things I said to her was, 'you know, it's pointless getting a Terry Smith or John Vernon onto your committee because they're never going to be able to make meetings and things. The thing is to get somebody that they choose from their executive or something and give them the time off to go do the United Way stuff'. And so that's what they decided. There was an opening on the Board of Directors and so Joy approached Terry, or Gerry first of all. And Gerry approached Terry and Terry approached me, and so I said, sure. ause he said, 'you know it's one meeting a month and maybe, and that's all you have to do'.

PW [00:53:18] Right [laughter].

KI [00:53:22] What a liar. So he appointed me as a member of the Board of Directors and my best buddy on there turned out to be Bob Stewart who was head of Scott Paper, because we understand working people, right? And he was very good, Bob. And so we formed kind of a thing on the board, like a caucus, a small caucus of two. And every time something would come up about the jobsite or something, you know we'd be to get our perspective across because both of us talked a lot. And anyway, I guess you could say the rest is history. I helped set up the current setup there where they have a labour committee on the board. We had four or five labour people and I set up where the chair of that committee would be elected by the people there and so forth. Up until then, David Rice was not all that supportive of the United Way, so they got him on side which was a big deal. In the meantime we hired Mervin van Steinberg who I disliked but was very effective at his job.

KI [00:55:22] And then in...was it '92 I guess, '93? '93, the job opportunity at the United Way came up. There's all kinds of...what happened in the meantime we had merged with the Haney Local and there's all kinds of glitches that were happening and I thought, okay if somebody leaves and they say they were responsible for this, this and this not happening or this happening. And that would take a lot of pressure off the local. So I had a good job then. It was a little bit of a pay cut, but it wasn't much. And I was ready for a change. I'd been involved with the union since 1971 and before that and... I'd had enough. I needed a rest from it. I thought, 'okay I'll take this United Way job'. So I took the job and at the same time I kind of let it be known that I was responsible for some of these glitches that happened from the...because it was my position, too, it was Financial Secretary. And so it was easy to take responsibility for a lot of that stuff because I was, you know as Financial Secretary you're manager of the office.

PW [00:57:12] So that took the heat off...

KI [00:57:15] Yeah, it took a lot of the heat off for those guys to finish off whatever needed to be done.

PW [00:57:23] So what year was that that you started at United Way?

KI [00:57:26] '93.

PW [00:57:27] OK so, and by that time, no you didn't do -- in the late '80s, there was a whole issue with the IWA and trying to become Canadian only, was there not? Were you involved in that at all?

KI [00:57:42] There wasn't so much... Stoney and Smith were both basically involved. The rest of us, you know, at the local level we're not involved. All we knew is what they would come back and tell us. And they were both for the withdrawal from the international.

PW [00:58:10] But you didn't really see any impact in your work.

KI [00:58:15] No, not really. No. The only impact was we had to take 'international' off the IWA. [laughter] And walk alone. [laughter]

PW [00:58:32] So when you went to the United Way, what was your favourite accomplishment when you worked there?

KI [00:58:42] When I worked there?

PW [00:58:43] Yeah. When you took the job.

KI [00:58:48] The involvement of OPEIU. I was kind of friendly with Anne Harvey beforehand, and I started a relationship with that union there and I nurtured it a lot and it grew. And our ICBC campaign is one of the best campaigns in the Lower Mainland and so yeah, I think the relationship that developed with OPEIU...or MoveUp.

PW [00:59:36] Yeah, now it's MoveUp. Well they went OPEIU and then OTEU.

KI [00:59:43] No, it's OTEU then OPEIU.

PW [00:59:45] And then COPE, and then MoveUp.

PW [00:59:49] Yeah. No so that, it was a big union though, for a BC union.

KI [00:59:57] Yeah.

PW [00:59:58] So United Way did such a great job of bringing some of the unions onside to donate, right?

KI [01:00:06] Yeah, well part of that again I can't say it was all me. What it was, was where I came from because our Local of the IWA was very well thought of I guess within the union, so a lot of the guys, they knew of Smith or Stoney or John Vernon or something. Bill Anderson. Or they'd know of them or they'd done something for their union or something and I carried... that helped me in whatever job I had. So a lot of what I accomplished in getting unions onside was built on the name that those guys had made of their union. So it's funny how within the labour movement, where you come from and what you've done, and what the people around you have done, weigh almost as much as your own accomplishments in effect. So I had a lot of help in doing a lot of things, in developing those relationships. And the other part of the thing that was at the same time, Mervin was doing very well, was delivering this Union Counselling Program at the CLC with the Winter School. And the Union Counselling part of it didn't grow as much as I'd like to have seen it, but it did grow somewhat and helped to, with those unions that were semi-supportive or partially supportive, it pushed them right over the edge and they became supporters like IBEW and Hydro. Hydro was another one that came onside that they run a very good campaign. And so... how should I put it -- I guess the Union Counselling when they decided very late we needed this kind of a program in the labour movement, and then just after that, employers started coming out with employee assistance programs or wellness programs, and all this kind of stuff. And so we were in competition basically with ourselves.

KI [01:03:08] And so it was a lot easier for unions to become part of a wellness program, or one of those employee-run programs because they were run by somebody from outside, so they didn't have to do it. Whereas with the Union Counselling Programs they had to have a Union Counselling Committee and people to set up positions and stuff like this. I don't know about the unions that you've been involved with, but most of the unions that if you come to with them anything that involves more work, they'll tell you to screw off.

PW [01:03:51] I would hazard a guess though and from personal experience probably what was being offered by the unions was actually better than -- EFAP has become, it's just like the contracting out, it's...

KI [01:04:02] Yeah, but the problem with it was, is that it was the best kept secret in the union movement that very few people of the union leadership knew what it was about and therefore they didn't...they thought, ah well there's another goddamn program like a wellness program that, you know, except it's gonna put more work for...give us more work and so...

PW [01:04:32] And it's part of that tension that I don't know if you experienced but I did, where you have union members and they're saying well why should we be paying for that, the employer should be paying for it.

KI [01:04:46] Actually we didn't have that problem. The unions that we approached about it that got inside wholesale, they welcomed this thing because they'd already experienced the employers' and they weren't happy with them. And so the approach that the ones that ended up running a full program like the Steelworkers, when they were Steelworkers, had a very good program and committee and union counsellors in each jobsite and stuff like this. So it worked really well. But one of the things that happened was like at Westminster Division Shake Mills is some of the information about individuals that union counsellors would collect, that the only place they could have got it was from the program. They had a program down there, M&B had a very good program. What the hell was it called? My memory's gone again. They had a very good program but some of the information that they were providing was leaking into management where we'd be fighting a grievance and all of a sudden we'd be faced with some, 'well this guy has done such and such a thing and he's a drunk' you know. And so that was the problem with employee-run programs.

BG [01:06:48] I wonder if I could jump in with a question. Going back to your time when you're still in the union in the '80s...

KI [01:06:55] I was always in the union.

BG [01:06:56] Well of course, yes. Still are, I'm sure, a lifetime member. But in the '80s there was a couple of big pieces of legislation that came down, there was also a big protest. In '83, there was that big package of Bills that came down the budget, then there was the Solidarity movement...

KI [01:07:14] Yeah I remember Solidarity, we were asked to be parade marshalls and that was a hell of a job. '

BG [01:07:22] And then in '87 there was the Bill 19 and Bill 20 that came out. Bill 19 was really targeting the private sectors and there was a one-day general strike that kind of came from that too. Yeah. So do you have any memories of '83 or '87 that you want to share?

KI [01:07:43] Well, not really.... A lot of that stuff touched the activists in the union and the people that were semi-active. The rest of them, the vast large majority or a large group of us, or not us, but of members, union, it didn't affect at all and I was busy servicing them more and so I left the politics of things to the officers.

PW [01:08:42] So when you said you were a marshal, was that on the day when they ended up in Empire Stadium.

KI [01:08:48] [nodding yes].

PW [01:08:48] I was so annoyed because I was a nurse and of course I couldn't get off shift, and didn't get to go.

KI [01:08:54] Well I sprained my ankle at the beginning of the day, jumping out of a van. And I ended up having to walk all the way to the Empire stadium. Oh jeez...

PW [01:09:16] Where was the Health and Safety Officer? [laughter]

KI [01:09:19] There wasn't one.

BG [01:09:24] Great, thank-you.

KI [01:09:25] And I remember standing out, standing in front of the doors protecting the goddamn Social Credit in the Hotel Vancouver. Goddamn, I felt like turning around and opening the doors on them. But anyway you could almost, well you could hear some conversation that was happening behind you and there were some of them that were quite scared that we were gonna break in. And they had a right to be scared. Then I remember the NDP legislated us back to work. So I learned then that we could support the NDP in a lot of things but we couldn't count on them when there's public pressure, a lot of public pressure.

PW [01:10:24] Do you want to say some more about the incident when they legislated you?

KI [01:10:33] Not really. It was not... the thing is we're on strike and we're...

PW [01:10:35] How long had that gone on?

KI [01:10:37] I guess, what was it - two months. And anyway that was the second longest strike that we'd ever been on, the union.

PW [01:10:50] So what was your strike pay like? Did you have a big war chest? Was the strike pay okay?

KI [01:10:56] Borrowed a lot of money [laughs] from Steelworkers and the BCGEU and who else was the big...UFCW. They were the three that stepped in for us. Oh, and Paperworkers Union, CPU. But ah...

PW [01:11:25] So was there, I can't remember much about that one. So was there mediation or anything going on and it wasn't working so...?

KI [01:11:36] We did everything we could and then as a last resort, I blame them, but I don't. I can see why politically they had to do it but I still say if they'd stood by their principles and we would have gained a lot.

PW [01:11:55] But can you remember what the key issue was?

KI [01:11:59] Contracting out.

PW [01:12:01] Oh yeah, there you go.

KI [01:12:02] And wages.

PW [01:12:04] That's interesting, with the contracting out because now they're, the current NDP is actually trying to do something about that.

KI [01:12:11] Yeah. Well one of the things that we told every government is that it's going to relieve the problem in the short-term but it's the long-term you're going to have problems with it. And the same thing GEU told the government when they privatized the highways.

PW [01:12:36] Oh yeah, it was a disaster.

KI [01:12:36] They told them in the short-term you're going to solve your problems, but long-term you've created a problem for you.

PW [01:12:47] Yeah, and it was devastating in the health sector too, the contracting out done there and they've been paying for it every time. This is a total diversion, but I was reading a lovely story from London, because I still keep in touch, about a university that brought all their cleaners back in-house and it was unbelievable the change and how people felt that they were part... you know how you were talking about how it felt like being a family etc. And that's exactly what happened there and guess what happened to their sick time? Right down. So yeah it's really a false economy with the contracting out. And I think from your experience, I'm sure that health and safety problems increased markedly as well.

KI [01:13:39] I would say health and safety became more of an issue, like it would be probably about 2 or 300 percent. You know, there's things that were dealt with as a matter of course when there was Celgar that became non-issues with the contractors and trying to resolve them was really hard.

PW [01:14:15] So how did how long did you work at United Way then? Did you go back?

KI [01:14:20] 17 years.

PW [01:14:21] And did you retire from that position?

KI [01:14:23] Yeah.

PW [01:14:23] But you never stopped with keeping up with the union.

KI [01:14:29] Well, in my position I had to stay current with whatever was happening in the labour movement.

PW [01:14:35] So what did you think about the merger?

KI [01:14:39] We were dying. You know the IWA was dying from lack -- because technology and just workplace re-organization stuff like this. And I mean we didn't have the members to support it anymore and...

PW [01:15:00] And I think NAFTA had a big impact too, didn't it.

KI [01:15:03] Yeah, yeah.

PW [01:15:11] So first of all I did want to ask you about what your thoughts were on the merger. We just had started to talk about the fact that there really, that the membership had to really...

KI [01:15:27] Dived.

PW [01:15:30] So how did you actually go about it procedurally. Like did all your members have a vote, or?

KI [01:15:38] Well I don't remember. I was at the United Way by then. But talking ... I had a lot of -- it was actually quite, very amusing that I had a lot of East Indian guys that took it -- I don't know -- look on me as their representative, their staff rep at the IWA. And so even after I left they kept phoning me and talking to me about this, that, and family problems and all this kind of stuff. So there's a lot of concern initially, or at the start about merging, period, with anybody and about losing their identity and things like this. But more than that, for the ordinary working guy who was -- the concern that was being put forward was they're going to have to take a cut in pay. Will they be as effective in representing them or not? And you know my experience with the Steelworkers has been very good. And so I said when the now Steelworkers, I said there shouldn't be any difference at all. And, I guess I proved to be closer to the truth than I thought. But, the concern was identity loss and lack of representation. And ah, but since the merger I think that both of those issues have been resolved.

PW [01:17:55] Well they formed the Wood Council was it?

KI [01:17:58] Yeah. They did the same thing with the Rubber Workers and the other people that they merged with. So I didn't think there was any danger of that anyway. I don't think that any outside force could come and destroy the identity of the woodworker anyway. I think we're too cross-grained and too individualist, too much an individual, group of individuals to be affected by that.

PW [01:18:40] And do you think that's partly just because it really was a pretty...it's a hard and dangerous job.

KI [01:18:46] Yeah. You know I think the transition was relatively smooth mainly because you'd get most of the guys and they were still staff reps.

PW [01:19:00] So then getting back to after when you retired, did you take it easy for a while or did you jump right into the working with the Forum, the BC Forum?

KI [01:19:13] Well, I was more involved with Forum when I was working, after 55 I became... or 50, I don't remember which but I became a member of Forum as soon as I could because Joy approached me first of all and... I thought they were, initially I thought they were quite ineffectual, that they were doing a lot of the work that (unclear) and Kube was doing rather than BC FORUM and stuff. And I thought that there's issues that he took on that FORUM should have been taking on. But nobody from FORUM seemed to be around to step up. And that has changed. Like Lorraine Logan and few of those people that stepped up. Diane Wood and so forth but, I'm not as involved as I'd like to be. But now, it's transportation. That was one of my big motivators to get better after my stroke, was trying to get my licence back. And now I find out the doctor tells me he doesn't think I'm going to get it back, period. Or he's not going to okay it. But... I think it was some place for us that had left the labour movement, the active part of the labour movement, to go to

after we retired, someplace we could affiliate ourselves with. But I don't think that they're getting involved with enough issues that you can get your teeth into, to get the people really involved with. And so it's a annual general meeting of 'we did this and we did that'. But who did that and who did this? We don't know. And so the few times that I felt involved which I guess was when Joy approached me to do something. And after she died, my interest. not my interest, but my activity died off. But I became their representative on the New West Labour Council. That was the other thing I guess, I was one of the longest serving members of the IWA on that Labour Council, after Ralph MacMillan.

PW [01:22:44] The New West one?

KI [01:22:44] Yeah.

PW [01:22:44] I never went to the New West & District, I used to go to the Vancouver & District one.

KI [01:22:49] Yeah right. I knew Caroline when she was nobody. [laughter] She was just Carolyn Chalifoux.

PW [01:23:02] So did you have more interesting debates? The Vancouver one, when Syd Thompson was the chair it was like you...

KI [01:23:08] Stoney was chair of New West.

PW [01:23:10] Right. Right. So he probably allowed for a little more dialogue?

KI [01:23:16] Stoney used to go pull a "shhhhh" trick on us quite a bit.

PW [01:23:28] With Syd it was like you had to run to the mike...

KI [01:23:29] Those were the days when the IWA and TWU were really at loggerheads. That John Johnson and few of those other guys were quite active and they tried to take over I guess. That was one of the reasons I think that Stoney ran for office was so he'd have a little more control, because Norm Kelly -- actually it was very interesting too -- Norm Kelly was... Art Kelly who was very influential on me in Revelstoke, was his brother, Norm Kelly. He was his younger brother. But Norm was nowhere near the guy Art was. But anyway.

PW [01:24:29] So that's quite a career in the labour movement that you've had from your work in the IWA, the Labour Council, and then the United Way, it's interesting.

KI [01:24:38] Well when I think about it, like Jack says, he looked down at me one time, and he says we're making history, Ken! [laughter] And I thought, are we? [laughter].

PW [01:24:57] And you were.

KI [01:24:57] Yeah, we were. I was involved with two historic strikes with the IWA. One of them was that longest one in our history and the other one was in the Interior when they always were paid less than the Coast in both the northern and southern Interior. And so we decided in '76 I think it was, we decided we'd fixed it. So we said -- what the hell was it -- I can't remember that goddamn slogan that we... Anyway we decided to - equal work, for

equal pay and we were determined that we would get it. We got it, except it only lasted one contract because they had, the Coast...

PW [01:26:00] Oh yeah, they bumped up...

KI [01:26:00] Yeah, got an increase but we were closer. And so that was very satisfying. The only problem was...I used to be a real sports car nut, and I had an Austin Healey, but this friend that I was telling you about, Barney Evan, he bought an e-type Jag and I, oh I fell in love with that car. It was a steel-gray coupe and it would go like stink. And I had a chance -- Barney was letting it go and I had a chance to get it except the bank wouldn't lend me any money because I was a member of the IWA.

PW [01:26:50] Oh my goodness.

KI [01:26:50] And we were on strike.

PW [01:26:56] How long did that strike go on for?

KI [01:26:59] Oh Christ that was a long one. 4 months, 4-1/2 months.

PW [01:27:09] So somebody else snapped up that vehicle.

KI [01:27:13] Yeah. But anyway.

PW [01:27:21] Okay, unless you can think of...

KI [01:27:22] I can't think of anything else. My memory's not that good since the stroke anyway.

PW [01:27:27] You know what, I think you're...that's baloney.

KI [01:27:33] No, it is, I mean my memory was a lot better when...

PW [01:27:35] OK, I was just joking. I mean I haven't had a stroke and what's my excuse because I can't remember certain things either.

KI [01:27:42] The thing is, I've always relied on my memory to do things and get things done, and now I can't do that, it's like driving.