

## **Interview: Mae Burrows**

**Interviewer: Sean Griffin and Bailey Garden**

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**Transcription: Joey Hartman**

**Sean Griffin** [00:00:00] Mae, first of all, can I get your full name and your birthdate and your birthplace?

**Mae Burrows** [00:00:08] My name is Mae Elizabeth Burrows, and I was born on April 11th, 1950 in the Beulah Home for Unwed Mothers in Edmonton, Alberta.

**Sean Griffin** [00:00:18] The Beulah Home for Unwed Mothers. That sounds like something from the last century. Can you tell me about that?

**Mae Burrows** [00:00:25] It was a Christian home that took in unwed mothers in those times. And I was there for a short period of time and then was adopted by Blanche and Wally Burrows of Camrose Alberta, and went home with them. But there's a whole history of the Beulah Home that is really worth historians looking up. It's got quite a long history and it's slightly connected to the eugenics movement in Canada in as much as the Beulah Home was one of the places where those sterilizations did take place of "feeble minded women" who usually were poor... Poor and obviously of low morals because they were pregnant and 20 years, for example, and without much money. Not saying everybody at Beulah was sterilized, but there was a connection there. And so it's really worth reading Amy Dyck's book on eugenics in Canada. But it was a Christian home and all that went with that, and this controversy, some think it was a very good place for the mothers to live and others feel that it wasn't as good. But that's where I was born, and there's a whole story about my meeting my birth family, but that's for another time and another place to tell.

**Sean Griffin** [00:01:47] But in terms of where you grew up with your adoptive family, that was in Camrose Alberta? How long were you there?

**Mae Burrows** [00:01:56] So my dad was one of the Burrows boys. And there was a ...there were my great-grandpa and my grandpa and my dad were all carpenters, carpenters and joiners they would call them. And I've got my great-grandpa's immigration papers as well as his references that he's of stable, sober character and is an industrious worker and a good carpenter and joiner. So my dad was the oldest of the Burrows boys, Burrows Construction, and my mom was a seamstress and a homemaker, I guess you would call them, a stay-at-home mom, pretty well. And we lived in Camrose Alberta, which is very Lutheran, very Lutheran town at that time. My mum's side were Norwegian and my dad's side obviously is British. So, and their parents before them, both on both sides, were homesteaders. The Norwegian family in the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana and my dad near Camrose - his family near Camrose. And what I find really interesting today is that, you know, I grew up feeling fairly proud of especially my grandmas who were both homesteaders, and how close to the land they lived and how many kids they had to raise on such little resources, really. And I always just felt really, like, they could make something from nothing you know, that was a sense of pride in our family. And now we're in this era where, there's oftentimes quite a bit of animus directed at white settlers who stole Indian land. And I'm trying to reconcile that as I work through what my personal and social reconciliation might be with Indigenous people.

**Sean Griffin** [00:03:44] That's interesting, So, I presume at some point you moved from Camrose to British Columbia?

**Mae Burrows** [00:03:48] Yeah, when I was six years old, I guess so -- my mum's father and mother on the Norwegian side, the Jeglums they had a farm, a small family farm in Haney, B.C. on Dewdney Trunk Road and, should I show this picture? (Holds photo) So here's a picture of me at 6 years old on Grandpa's big work-horse. And there's grandpa tilling the soil kind of by hand, with that kind of equipment. And that was the era. So he had a lot of chickens, and so we sold chickens and eggs. And then he had some vegetables, too. Yeah, but it was primarily chickens and eggs. But we had a range of vegetables. And I mean, when I grew up, it was all about putting food by and spending your summers making sure that you had lots of stuff canned so that you had it in the winter. Haney was also a fishing town because, of course, we're on the Fraser River. So we for sure went and got salmon, and had a cupboard full of canned salmon, too, to tide us over in the winter.

**Sean Griffin** [00:05:03] Was your dad continuing to work as a carpenter?

**Mae Burrows** [00:05:06] My dad was... My dad had several trades. He did do some work in British Columbia as a carpenter. He also was an ironworker and a welder, because these trades all worked very much together. And then at a certain time in his life, we used to have this as a sort of a saying or a joke "everybody eventually goes to work for the post office." So dad and his um.... He hurt his back and so he couldn't do the same kind of construction work and that, that he was doing before. So he got a job as an inside worker in the post office. And I brought a poster along of my dad in the 1965 wildcat strike that was put on by the postal workers across Canada. And it was the largest wildcat strike in Canadian history. And it won collective bargaining rights not only for Posties, but also for many other public sector workers. So I feel kind of proud of my dad. He was very much a union man. Yeah. I don't know if he was shop steward or president of the local or what, but he was very active. And he really taught me a lot about, you know, there's workers and there's the boss. I won't go into a lot of details on that. And the other thing about dad and the strikes he was on, that was one strike, and then there were many, many other strikes that he was engaged in.

**Mae Burrows** [00:06:33] And he would come home from the picket line, oftentimes with blood on his face. Obviously, there had been really quite vicious fights on the picket line. And I don't know the full details on that, but I really got a lot of my sense of working class solidarity and unionism from my dad.

**Bailey Garden?** [00:06:55] Do you mind standing up with the poster just for a second?

**Mae Burrows** [00:06:58] (Shows poster) So, his poster... When my dad retired, this is a picture that was in the Haney Gazette, which was the Haney paper. And I took it and I got it blown up, and when my dad retired, I presented it to him at the big banquet. And the postmaster was retiring at that time, too. And I presented this to my dad saying, "since you spent so much of your time in this job on the picket line, I thought you should have this picture, this poster to commemorate that." And it got everybody, got a good laugh out of that one. That's Wally Burrows.

**Sean Griffin** [00:07:43] I think one of the pieces of common history that our generation who grew up in sort of semi-rural areas and whatnot, and suburban areas, is that you

ended up going to work every summer in some job or another. Is that your experience as well, growing up in Haney?

**Mae Burrows** [00:07:58] Oh, absolutely. I mean, part of this story is that there was a lot of unemployment too, in the 50s and 60s. So we -- and my mom actually was a brittle diabetic -- so she was quite ill a lot of the time, so she couldn't work outside the home. And sometimes dad didn't have work, so we had to really ... I started contributing to the family income when I was about twelve or thirteen. And my first summer jobs for two summers were picking fruit in the Fraser Valley. And I look back on it and I just think, you know, as a health and safety person, how sort of bizarre it was. Unfortunately, I don't think a lot of the working conditions have improved that much. But, you know, as a 13 year old girl, I would walk down to one of the mall parking lots just down the street from our home at five o'clock in the morning and a big truck had already been driving around, picking up people at various parking lots, and we'd jump in. There were no seats in the back, you just try to find a spot. And if you could get to an early parking lot, then at least maybe you could have a spot that was against the wall so that you weren't bumping all the time when you're driving out. And then the truck would eventually get full and then they'd disgorge us somewhere in Abbotsford or Chilliwack for the day. Yeah. And I mean, I think about that now -- a 13 year old girl doing that. So lots of South Asian people, lots of Asian people, Chinese people were fruit pickers, and then us poor white people were fruit pickers and we've pick for 25 cents a flat - so that was probably like eight baskets. No washrooms, no lunchrooms, no places to wash your hands, to eat lunch. You brought your lunch, of course. And then they'd load us in the van again at 5:00. And we'd be home by 6:00. And that was my summer holiday, and I remember one year deciding for myself that I was going to take the long weekend off before I went back to school, and I informed my employer, the farmer. And he said, "no, you're not. You're owed money and you're not getting it unless you work the weekend, period." So, so much for self-determination of farm workers. So I learned a lot about class and I learned a lot about just really exploitive working conditions. That was pretty bad.

**Sean Griffin** [00:10:35] Any other jobs that you had?

**Mae Burrows** [00:10:37] I had worked all the way through, so I did it for two years, and then I really got myself promoted up to working at Berry Land Cannery on the line. And, you know, again, it was ...and I was very low in ... I was a teenager and low in seniority. But I don't think ... I think I lied about my age. You lie about your age because you're supposed to be - I think you're supposed to be 16 in those days and we'd just say we're 16. And I was in no way was I 16 yet. So a couple of my girlfriends and I got those jobs. We worked midnights. We worked the evening shift because the preferred shift was during the day and we just didn't have the seniority for that. And yeah, you'd.... My job was basically to sort the rotten berries, try to pull them off as they're running by on the chain.

**Sean Griffin** [00:11:28] Canning raspberries?

**Mae Burrows** [00:11:28] Oh they were canning all kinds of fruit, strawberries, raspberries, probably blueberries. And the thing is, if you had to go to the bathroom, you had to clock out because you couldn't be doing that on company time. And there was, again, we'd stand outside and eat our food at lunchtime or whatever. And, you know, it wasn't only poor health and safety conditions. I just think about it in terms of the food production because it was a real.... So one time I had a cold, and of course you'd wear gloves when you're doing it. And so i had these thick gloves on and I had this really bad cold. And so, here's a really gross story, but this is so common. I either had to clock out and go blow my

nose or do something, or else I just sneezed into my gloves and then it's like: get going... get going. And so I did. And at that time, I had a boyfriend who was in Vancouver and he worked at McGavin's Bakery. So we'd talk, and he'd talk about the maggots in the bread that had been left over sort of overnight, and I'd talk about that. So there's your bread and jam from, you know, the early 60s. Pretty gross eh?

**Mae Burrows** [00:12:44] So that was that job. And then my next job was working the pant press at a local dry cleaner and oh, lost a lot of weight that year, and my skin was really good. And it was a good job. I liked doing it. I was pretty fast. And then I guess the next job was as a cleaner at Essondale, in Coquitlam.

**Mae Burrows** [00:13:07] Well, my dad would drive me into Coquitlam and I would just be I was a cleaner. And I think the building I worked in was mostly for people who had various kinds of dementia. It was very much an institution, but it was a safe place. And my job was, of course, to wash the bathrooms, and then one of the big things is that if there was a so-called terminal, somebody died in their beds, you'd have to wash the mattresses down and wash the walls and all of that. I guess I sort of look at the people who are now in nylon tents in the rain downtown, and, you know, Essondale was a .... I didn't see abuse there, but then maybe I didn't see abuse, I was just too young or something. But I'd rather have my mom or dad if they had dementia in a bed that was clean and there was food and social activity, than a nylon pup tent downtown. So that was that.

**Sean Griffin** [00:14:04] And virtually all of these jobs, you were barely old enough to work at - legally to work?

**Mae Burrows** [00:14:11] By this time I was pretty much... By then I'd gotten up to sort of 17, 18. Yeah. And then I started university at Simon Fraser. And of course, I went to Simon Fraser on bursaries. I would not take out a loan because that's just not something our family did. We did not buy anything if we couldn't afford it, period. So I got bursaries and scholarships, but that wasn't enough to live on, so the job I got next was driving the elevator at The Bay (Department Store). Right. You know, "third floor... Skywalk to your right, ladies wear" and so you know, you do that like all day and, well, yes, I go like this (swings arm)...Like this -- this is the lever that opened the door. And it was nice. I chatted with lots of the regular customers and stuff, But, oh, my God, being in an elevator all day watching the seconds inch by was challenging sometimes. And yeah, the worst part was that I had low seniority there as well, and so what used to rankle me was that I always got the early break right, so my lunch and stuff was well over before noon, and we had to go until 6:00. So it was like two 15-minute breaks and a half an hour break. So that was a long stretch of time in the afternoon. And we had to wear these really prissy little suits that they gave us with little hats. And by then I was at SFU and involved in the PSA and all my friends were hippies and long hair, beards and all of this, and I remember meeting one of them in the cafeteria on my break and being informed that when I was in uniform, that I really shouldn't be hanging out with that riff-raff.... be seen downstairs with that riff-raff. So anyway, that supported me for a couple of years at university and then I got a job to keep going. I've had a lot of jobs -- worked all my life.

**Mae Burrows** [00:16:15] And then I got a job in teen recreation in Coquitlam and that was wonderful. That's probably my second year university and yeah, just organizing and running teen programs through Coquitlam Parks and Recreation. So I had park jobs in the summer and then in the winter we'd have like crafts and dances and sports and stuff like that. And it was it was a very nice job.

**Sean Griffin** [00:16:41] Yeah. So you eventually came out of SFU with your degree?

**Mae Burrows** [00:16:48] Yeah, I did.

**Mae Burrows** [00:16:50] So I was involved in PSA strike, which is certainly a piece of history that people should look at, which was really about student self-determining what they wanted to live... or learn, so it was pretty interesting. PSA - the Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology strike. Yeah. And then I moved into English and I got an honours degree and with women about women in Victorian literature, which was really pretty inspiring. And I think it's partly where I've got the gift of the gab from is reading some of those wonderful verdant Victorian novels that gave me a real sense of language, but also gave me a real sense of injustice. And, you know, these women railing against the definition of themselves in society. And the inequality and poverty in society and mental health issues and so on. So I had this degree in English Literature and back in those days I was almost a charter student. I started at SFU in '68 and graduated in '72. And in those days, you know, it wasn't like people nowadays when they get a degree and they have to go beg some place to give them a decent job with their education. Employers would come up to the university and set up tables and try to hire you on the spot if you're willing. And so as I was walking around the tables, I came across one which was the federal penitentiary service, so I got a job along with four other lovely, beautiful women my age. And I don't think it was necessarily about feminism and women moving into that workplace. It was a moment in prison history in Canada where they were trying to humanize the prisons a little bit more. There was a real time of prison reform. Claire Culhane and some of the prison riots were starting to happen at that time. So I was really taking a look at the prison system not just being there for punishment, but also for rehabilitation. And so I was what was called a classification officer, and so our job really was to work with the prisoners, the inmates, and try to help them get some kind of Red Seal training or some kind of vocation so that when they got out they might be in a better spot, not a worse spot, than when they went in. And it was also a time when we worked with families... like family groups and community groups were welcomed into the prison. And so I really enjoyed that work, and there was a lot of sort of counselling. And I look back on it, my God, I was 23 years old, right? So what is this really? Like, what did I know about people's lives who'd suffered much more than I had and were much older. But we used to do transactional analysis, you know, I'm okay-you're okay; parent, adult and child; where are you coming from? How - you know - are you coming from your adult? Which would be very authoritarian, or your no parent, authoritarian, adult, rational child.

**Sean Griffin** [00:20:06] This must have been a new experience for the inmates as well.

**Mae Burrows** [00:20:10] Yeah, I think some of them.

**Sean Griffin** [00:20:12] So how did they respond to these young women coming in?

**Mae Burrows** [00:20:16] Well, it's so ridiculous in a way, but on the other hand, it did humanize the jails. And I just want to add a story here. One of the people I carpooled with out to - I was at Matsqui out in Abbotsford - was Mary Steinhauser. And for historians, her story is a really important one to know. Mary and I worked at Matsqui together. She had a nursing and a counselling - a social work background. And then after that, and it really was ... the prisoners really welcomed, you know, the softness and the caring that did happen, because they're people, and probably half of them were FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) or were there because of some drug addiction or something so they shouldn't have been punished. I think now, years later, we're realizing how primitive it has

been; how we've treated people and sent them to jail if they have an addiction issue, for instance. So they liked the kindness. And Mary was exemplary in terms of the programs that she brought in. So when we both left Matsqui, I went to a place called the Burrard Community Correctional Centre, which was atop the YMCA on Burrard Street in Vancouver. And that was a pre-release centre where you literally were working with the inmates to help them reconnect with their families, go out for meals with them, because they've been eating for five years or ten years or three years or whatever by themselves in their cells, which is a pretty awful thing to make somebody do. So they need somebody help them break into the restaurant scene and to eat with other people and to just get their lives in order. So that was the job I did for a couple of years. And then Mary went to the BC Pen (Federal Penitentiary) when it was that awful structure out there on the Fraser River, and did some wonderful programs like, for instance, she got it so that people could read books other than the Bible when they were in solitary confinement. This was an era of terrible solitary confinement for people who were already dysfunctional and distressed. And one of the people who was in solitary confinement for four years straight was Andy Bruce - and actually that's Chief Dan George's nephew - and Andy Bruce got out into the public and was working with Mary, and they were bringing in people from the community and having really, sort of civilized social interactions that had a purpose. And he heard that he was going to get sent back to the hole and really flipped out, and so he and three others took hostages and Mary was one of them. And to make a long and very tragic story short, she was murdered by one of the guards during that hostage taking. And so in that - that was 1975 by now - so during that era, it was an era of prison reform and we should have more of it.

**Bailey Garden** [00:23:30] Before we go any further. I wonder if we could just go back to when you were at SFU and mentioning that strike of students. Can you just talk a little bit more about what that was about? Like SFU was a very radical campus at the time being a new one, and also maybe like with your participation in it....was that inspired by seeing your father on the picket line when you were younger or was it the issue that inspired you? Do you remember what he did tell you?

**Mae Burrows** [00:23:58] OK. So when I was at SFU, I entered in 1968 and I had pretty limited experience at that time. I mean, Haney, you know, but it was that thrilling kind of thing. Learning about anthropology was so amazing to me to learn about other cultures and customs and that people lived differently, and to understand sociology and political science. It was all new and sparkling and there were a group of professors who were really radical and it was all about the radicals versus the conservatives. It was a very radical time and I self-identified with the radicals. And Louis Feldhammer was one of my idols and really what I remember then is that part of the radicalism was that they were -- it was kind of Paulo Friere, you know. Even before I had read Paulo Friere, it was about conscientization and that education should not be depository; it should be participatory. And so part of -- and I've used that in all of my work for the rest of my life, that was so formative. And I still think about "Are you being treated as a subject or an object?" And that really defines what's wrong with the situation to me. And "are you participating in this conversation, this job, this movement," ... whatever, or are you the image was that, you know, you could have 20 wine bottles in front of you and throw a bucket of water over them and there would get to be little bit of stuff in each bottle....That's a depository education, which is coming from a lecture-based, objectified kind of thing. So I really identified with the participatory aspect of it. And we were really, I think, talking about cooperatively deciding what we're going to learn and things like that, which was not to be had in that institution. And so they started pressuring the profs, and then we had a strike and they were eventually all fired. And I don't even know if we felt like we lost that one

because we had made such a point. So, yes, it was very much part of my being by then. And it was also as formative as reading those magnificent women writers from the Victorian era.

**Sean Griffin** [00:26:26] This was the SFU Seven (7 fired professors) as they became known.

**Mae Burrows** [00:26:28] Oh, I guess they might have. I don't know that - maybe. So that was really formative in my life. So then that was university and that was the (unclear) thing. And then I got another job after that - I got a job at the Maples Youth Centre - that was a BCGEU cert and it was a residential treatment centre for kids and their families who had mental health issues. And again, I'm not really sure if we knew what we were doing, but my sense of the whole thing was to just try to be as kind to these kids as possible and include their families.

**Sean Griffin** [00:27:16] Which was probably fairly unique at that time.

**Mae Burrows** [00:27:17] Yeah. So, I did that job for a couple of years and it was a family oriented place, which was good. But then they started introducing locked cells and a lot of heavy medications as opposed to other ways of being with kids, like for instance I became a lifeguard at that time because if you had that certificate, you could take the kids to the pool. And one of my really strong senses of helping someone with mental health issues is to try to help them get up in the morning and go to the pool. And, you know, and there was really good art therapy there and good recreation therapy and good family therapy .... And then they started the locked cells and it became a different place. And so we all kind of ... A number of us exited.

**Sean Griffin** [00:28:09] I'm presuming that a lot of this experience is what prompted you to take on teacher training?

**Mae Burrows** [00:28:14] Well, that was the next thing that I did ... I went back to UBC and got my teaching certificate, which is actually a bit of an ordeal. But anyway, I did it. Yeah, I was just like by then now I'm the oldest one in the room, like I'm 25 or something. Right? And everyone else is like 19. So I did that and I got a really good job at Sutherland (Secondary School) in North Van being the learning assistance centre teacher. And I did that for a few years. I really loved working with the kids and I think really helped them with their social and academic issues. And then I got a job at Douglas College after that. So now we're all the way up to 1979.

**Sean Griffin** [00:28:56] It certainly sounds like, you know, one of the skills or the inclinations that you brought to these jobs was really wanting to teach people and get them to learn, as you say, positive learning and get them to participate.

**Mae Burrows** [00:29:13] And to feel good about themselves.

**Sean Griffin** [00:29:13] And so when ... you also later went on into literacy training and helping adults learn and get ahead in the workplace. Can you tell me about that a bit?

**Mae Burrows** [00:29:23] Yeah. So I had a job for really pretty well 11 years at Douglas College. I was full-time regular faculty and I taught either basic literacy or adult upgrading, so that they could do university prep. And so what that would look like is mostly people that either really were doing basic learning, basic reading or else in a more university prep.

And I taught math and reading. And so, for instance, with math it's partly the math you're teaching, but it's more also helping people understand their relationship with math and their own learning capacity. So you're doing a lot more about math anxiety a lot of the time than you're doing about math. And to this day, I still have relationships with people that started in adult basic education with me, adult literacy. And what I feel good about is that they said "you were so kind and so patient" and that makes me feel good. And obviously they learned something because they went on to have much more successful lives with those skills than not.

**Mae Burrows** [00:30:43] So during that time, though, that was a full time job, and so I always tend to have something off the side of my desk as well. So I had two special projects. I was really interested in video production at that time and there was a really neat place run by Sara Diamond and Paul Wong down in Gastown called the Video Inn. And they gave you the basics of directing and creating a video. And we could use the editing space for a certain amount and so I was really wanting to do video production. So I did a video production of "Caught in The World of Pesticides" with the Canadian Farmworkers' Union and the Deol Society. And so what it was, it was two things; one is the production of the video which was trying to show people the exposures to pesticides. And it's so subtle because you can't see them or necessarily smell them, but they're very pervasive on the fields. So we use an animation kind of thing. So, for instance, people would take off their turbans at night and place them next to their food and their kids not understanding that the exposures were airborne by now.... and so we'd have like yellow or orange or whatever "neeee-urre" (animated warning sound) whenever there was a pesticide exposure, and the farmworkers loved it. And so, like somebody who'd be in the tractor and and then there'd be spray and then "urahhgh" (warning sound) you know, all this green and orange and stuff. So it was really quite good. And then along with that, we did a kind of a learning package teaching English as a second....English as an additional language for inter-generational families. So we'd have two or three families meeting together and they would be going over, with a peer tutor or a facilitator or whatever, a book about exposures to pesticides and learning English at the same time through that theme and doing it inter-generationally. And that went on for quite a long time.

**Sean Griffin** [00:32:50] You did this largely as a volunteer?

**Mae Burrows** [00:32:52] Yeah, that was a volunteer activity. So that was really fun. And at that time, we also did a video with Key Change, which was really popular lefty band at the time, Jamie Larue and her bunch. And so it was the Cinderella myth, so it was a video to ... so that's what happened to a lot of women that ended up in the adult basic education program. At some point, they got married....they thought the prince would look after them...so they got married and had a kid or whatever. And then the prince has taken off and they've got a Grade 8 education, so they need to do some upgrading so that they can get another job. So that was a big population. And so we did this video that was a rock video about the Cinderella myth and how to climb out of it. And it was very good. And that was used nationally by a number of women's organizations. It was done through an organization called Women Skills. So that was another volunteer piece.

**Sean Griffin** [00:33:58] And this while you're holding down a full-time job?.

**Mae Burrows** [00:33:59] Yeah. And so the other thing I'll just say on this area, I knocked on a lot of unions' doors because I wanted.... at that time, the Frontier College was really almost the only one around that was doing kind of adult education in the community. This was in a college... So I wanted to do a program that was in conjunction with unions. And I



knocked on the BC Fed door, and I knocked on a number of doors, and the door got opened at CAIMAW with Jef Keighley. And what we ended up developing was a fairly longstanding program that took place at the union hall during the shift break time. So, people that had day shift and then people that were before they went on to evening shift could come to the union and either do adult upgrading or English as a second language work. And that was just a really nice kind of joint college program that lasted quite a few years.

**Sean Griffin** [00:34:57] Was that done through the College?

**Mae Burrows** [00:34:59] Yeah. I got the College to sign onto that, and the College provided the instructors, so they were part of our discipline at the College and they did this outreach. We also had outreach in the prison - the women's prison. And, you know, we had a number of outreach programs at that time for adult basic education. And this was one of them.

**Sean Griffin** [00:35:20] So was there a fair amount of participation?

**Mae Burrows** [00:35:21] Oh, yes, it's a wonderful thing to do. It's because it was what we talk about with mental health today - it's like meeting people where they're at. About one of the biggest, hardest things for people to do is find that time, and if you can give them a space and the time, they'll take that opportunity to learn. So that was I don't know how long that program lasted, but quite a long time.

**Sean Griffin** [00:35:44] For them, it was a free program?

**Mae Burrows** [00:35:45] Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. No - all of this was very --- actually the adult basic education staff was quite, quite political relative to some of the other faculties at the College, because I think we worked with working class people mostly, and we were very politically oriented group. So we self-propagated like that, like by hiring more politically oriented people. But we were; one of the other things that I did with Cindy Onstad, who was teaching at Vancouver Community College, is that...and Geoff Dean from Surrey, there was a group of us .... See adult basic education was sort of seen as not really education .... it's kind of like a hobby you should have, you know, you've got knitting and then you go and you teach people how to read and different things like that. It's not really a profession. So that's how we were treated, and so we didn't have any prep time and we didn't have marking time, and then we were expected to do committee work, but we weren't paid for it. So we've formed through the Adult Basic Education Association, which we did a lot of work on forming, basically our own little union that said, "our working conditions are our students' learning conditions....so you need to give us time for prep and marking and meetings." And we were very successful in that at that time. Oh, absolutely -- see we used to win things. This is what we need to look back on history for, because we did used to win things.

**Sean Griffin** [00:37:21] Well it was a time of great change in education.

**Mae Burrows** [00:37:25] That was the '70s.

**Sean Griffin** [00:37:27] Well, you also were obviously much later, and we'll go into that, very much known as an environmental leader and activist. Was it the farmworkers' thing that sort of led you in that direction?

**Mae Burrows** [00:37:39] Well, I had personal exposure to pesticides and farm work. And then the Canadian Farmworkers' Union was so inspiring at that time. This wasn't the Raj Chouhan era. It was just a bit after that. It was Sarwan Boal ... I'm not saying his name right at all. B-O-A-L. So he was running the Farmworkers' Union and the Deol Society. And they were very political.

**Sean Griffin** [00:38:12] What was the Deol Society?

**Mae Burrows** [00:38:16] D-E-O-L - you know how so many organizations, including the Fishermens' union later on, have a political face and a charities face? And so the political face was the Canadian Farmworkers' Union and the charity space - the educational charity space - was the Deol Society, and it was named after a young farmworker who was overly exposed to pesticides and went into some kind of psychosis and then drank pesticide and died. So we did a lot of the education work through the Deol Society. But you see, this is starting to inch me into, because the Canadian Labour Congress, primarily through Dick Martin, I think, hooked on to the Canadian Farmworkers' Union and supported them. And it was just such a righteous thing to try to help farmworkers get better working conditions and pay, and not be exposed to pesticides. I mean, pregnant women were being exposed to pesticides - it's just so wrong. What can you say? And so that started hooking me into a bit closer with organized labour. But I mean....

**Sean Griffin** [00:39:29] At some point during you applied for the job as environmental director of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union.

**Mae Burrows** [00:39:33] Yeah. So when I was just turning 40 - that magic moment in some people's lives - It's like I was really wanting to become a mother and that had not happened yet. And I was really pretty much a wrap on the marking and the teaching and stuff, so I enrolled at SFU. I thought I'll do a master's degree - that's something to do. And so I did that, and then started really coming in touch with the whole.... this was the time of the Brundtland Commission and the whole sustainability three-stool thing, and I also, part-time, I took a leave from Douglas College, and then I also got a job with Joan Sawicki and Gary Runka as one of Gary's assistants so I was doing research for some of his projects - environmental projects. And I also got a part-time job at the Sierra Club, so I was starting to edge my way into environmental work both through my studies and through the small jobs. And that's when the Fishermens' Union job came up. And I heard about the Fishermens' Union job probably from my cousins. I have a lot of family that were in the fishing industry at that time. My cousins up on Malcolm Island in Sointula in particular. So I heard about it, applied for it, and got it.

**Mae Burrows** [00:40:53] And to just go back a tiny bit about environmental stuff just to close off the chapter on SFU. Well, I got a graduate degree. I took every -- oh, and then my son came along when I was 41. So there I was with a part-time job at Douglas, a part-time job at the Fishermens' Union, a graduate degree and a baby. So that was the beginning of a burnout cycle. Let me tell you that for one thing, because you can cross a line, I found out. But I did finish my -- I got straight A's through graduate school -- and I ended up writing a master's thesis on consensus negotiations. It was called "Consensus Negotiations: Conflict Resolution or Containment." Guess what the answer is? I did that as I was working at the Fishermens' Union and it was from the Vancouver... So I was the environmental director of the Fishermens' Union and I was the director of the T Buck Suzuki, the charitable arm of that... the T Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation. And through that, one of the pieces of our job was to go.... So this is Donna Gross, David Lane and myself primarily... To go to the Vancouver Island CORE processes, which were

supposed to be consensus negotiation. But of course, with the corporate forestry sector and so on sitting there representing their fiduciary responsibilities they had to their shareholders -- and people like us, you know, Donna Gross was a deckhand -- there was no room for consensus because there wasn't, really, common ground. So I really learned that the questions I was trying to test were: Can you find common ground? Can you change the paradigm by sitting at a round table? Is the dynamics of that roundtable piece going to give you a greater understanding and more collective action?... And my conclusion was "no", because you've got to really look at the economic reality of the situation. For one thing, there we were, sleeping on people's couches and holding down two other jobs and doing all of the research and all of the communication with our members. And there would be Sholto Heberton from the forestry sector with his 20 secretaries back at the office doing the work for him, and staying in a real nice place. So it was really... It was actually it was published in a book called "The Forest and the People" by Debra Salazar and several articles spun out of it. So it was a really productive piece of academic work. And it really taught me a lot about negotiations. "Is this an instrumental conversation or is this trying to be a consensual conversation?" So, it really helped to frame a lot of the work that we did consequent to that. And I could mention my dedication in my Master's thesis, if you will indulge me. So when I was in Grade 8, so thirteen, I guess I was probably working at Berryland in the summer. And, I was kind of running our house and everything, and my family didn't have a lot of money that year or during that time. And so I remember my Grade 8 guidance counsellor - she used to like ...the desks were all somehow below her....at least that's how I felt... and then she'd sit on this table and cross her legs, and I found it so..... and then she said to me, like, I guess we'd all taken some kind of a test the day before --something like an IQ test I suppose. And my family was not a learned family - they went out and earned a living - they didn't read a lot of books and stuff like that. So they're really vocabulary tests, let's face it, a lot of the IQ tests. But anyway, Miss Tomlinson said to me, "you know, here we are, and you've got to decide what courses you're going to be taking next year, Grade 9". It's called streaming in those days, I had to decide what stream I was going to go into - was it going to be academic or something else, and she said, "you know, working class girls don't go to university, and besides, your parents couldn't afford to send you." And I thought mmmmmmm. So I dedicated my Master's Thesis here (holds up thesis document). Big eh?. It's really big. Yeah, it's got a lot of, I included a lot of the, like the interest statements from all the sectors. And that's really interesting. But anyway, it's all very interesting. But the dedication reads this: shall I hold this up? OK. So it says, "I would like to dedicate my Master's Thesis to my Grade 8 guidance counsellor who told me that working class girls don't go to university. She has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation throughout my life." Thank you Miss Tomlinson.

**Sean Griffin** [00:46:01] We will assume that Miss Tomlinson has passed on.

**Mae Burrows** [00:46:03] Oh, I shouldn't really be saying her name, but oh. Ha ha.

**Sean Griffin** [00:46:07] But the UFAWU (United Fishermen & Allied Workers Union) had a long sort of record of environmental activism and things like the Moran Dam and fish farming and that sort of thing. What kind of issues did you encounter when you first came into the position? This would have been in what?

**Mae Burrows** [00:46:20] 1990 - 1991 - the end of 90. So I was just 40ish. It was just such a dream job because it was with working class people, men and women in the fishing industry all up and down the coast. So you had that real grassroots aspect to it and working class aspect to it. And it was really functional union in those days. You know,

there were fabulous conventions, where people really talked about things and debated and on and on. It was very, very interesting and real camaraderie and joy working together. And one of the oldest union newspapers in Canada at that time being edited by David Lane, then consequently edited by Sean Griffin. And having that instrument, you know, of a newspaper to connect with our members on a fairly frequent basis was really, really a big part of it as well as the conventions. So we did.... the job was really to work with the Environment Committee, which was really a large committee of many, many people. I mean, Edgar Birch was notable. Mark Warrior, Todd White, David Lane, John Stevens of course. And a lot of really good people in that - Arnie Nagy - I'm sure I left out names, but they were all over the province. So that was amazing. And we worked on any issue that had to do with water quality or fish habitat. So boom, that's a lot of issues, right?

**Mae Burrows** [00:48:01] So without going into all the issues, I'd like to focus on three. One of them is marsh habitat reclamation. So one of the things that we were really trying to protect and educate people about was the importance of estuaries. So through the CORE process, for instance, there'd be people like -- that's when the American funding started coming in and there'd be environmentalists who would be at that table without connections to the community and wanting to protect big trees primarily. And big trees need protection, but we also were saying estuaries were very important for salmon, for our members, there's a natural affinity between the members and habitat protection. So one of the big projects that we used to get funding for from places like VanCity (Credit Union) was marsh reclamation, so there's a lot of stray logs that, for instance, go onto the very delicate marshland in the Fraser estuary, where the salmon need to rest on both ends of their life journey, and then eel grass would just be crushed by all these stray logs. So we first started doing, and Mitch Anderson and Paul Kant were involved in this...we would do these marsh reclamation projects where we would get the logs taken off the marshes, and it was a very arduous and very difficult to do. We tried to add value to them. For instance, we were going to try to use them as playground material... and I had a lovely playground built in my backyard ...but we couldn't really make that into a goal because we just didn't have the storage area and the capacity to do that marketing and building. So we decided that one of the big problems is that we could be hauling these logs off the marshes 'til hell froze over, but they'd keep coming back...so why was that waste coming back all the time? Because the logs were wasted. So we discovered a couple of things there in working with the log salvors in the Fraser River and what we discovered was, for one thing, they were not getting paid enough to bring the logs to the one log sorting station that existed on the Fraser River and it was run by the forest industry. So the forest industry was dumping the garbage and then you had to somehow subsidize your gas and your time to haul the logs in there, to turn them in to get not quite enough money for the logs. So that was the problem we are trying to solve, really. And we called the project "Wood Not Waste." So how could we use this wood? Because it was really salvageable wood. And so Mitch Anderson played a very big role in this. He was working at the Fishermens' Union and then he consequently developed this project and ended up....There's still people employed in this project. So what happened was we did two things. We had to organize the log salvors because there were dependent contractors who are very hard to organize, actually. But we did dockside organizing. We'd go down there and we would talk to them and then we'd move into to a meeting at the CAW Hall (Canadian Auto Workers) at that time and I'd make the sandwiches and we'd have a meeting, and eventually we formed a co-op. It's called the Western Log Sort and Salvage Co-op. And so these guys became the Co-op. They became that Co-op.

**Mae Burrows** [00:51:24] And then the other thing is that we still had to haul the logs to the forest industry's one depot, which didn't pay enough money. So we had to solve that

problem. So we found a guy who really knew a lot about numbers and wood and stuff like that from Vernon - the Vernon log-sort. And Mitch got a suit. We got all dressed up and we went over to Victoria and met with a couple of bureaucrats asking if we could have a log salvage license so that we could pay the guys in the co-op the proper amount of money to get the logs so they weren't wrecking the marshes. I have to say, at the beginning, there wasn't a - you sort of had this sense with these bureaucrats that they were thinking "their lips are moving, but I wonder how long they're going to stay here." They were active in the conversation, let me say, so we're asking for license. So at one point one guy sort of popped up and said to the other one, "well, what would we have to do to get them a license?" And the other guy said "I don't know - nobody's ever asked before," and we've got the license and to this day that co-op is still hauling the wood and getting proper value for the log salvors. And, it's a job. It's jobs. We created jobs out of that. And we did Wood Not Waste.

**Sean Griffin** [00:52:40] And cleaned up...

**Mae Burrows** [00:52:43] And cleaned up the marsh. Now, there you go. That's what I mean. We used to win in the old days. So that was one thing. And then, of course, the famous - one of my most exciting campaigns - was the Kemano 2 (dam) campaign. And there's so many parts to this, I just feel like it's so many parts to this. But the main idea is that the genius engineers with the '50s thinking thought it's really a good idea to get a river to flow in the opposite direction, so they would build dams and do that, not thinking about what might happen to the river, such as the Fraser River, which would have if you take a lot of water out it, you're going to have different water temperatures, you're going to affect fish passage as well as water quality and water temperatures. Well, they in the '50s, they decided to divert the Nechako River, which is in the north of B.C., to go the opposite way and to provide a dam at the aluminum smelter in Kitimat. And what was supposed to happen with that is that the water diversion was supposed to power the aluminum smelter, and it should have been tied to the jobs that were there. At that time there was 2,600 jobs, and it should have been tied to not selling power into the grid. So anyway, a lot of that didn't happen and they wanted to divert more water out of the river. And at that time, it was the time of the appropriation and politicization of the civil service in the federal fisheries department. It was (Prime Minister Brian) Mulroney and his bunch. And there was a group of really talented, knowledgeable scientists; these old men with grey hair that just knew so much about fish who had all said, "no, you can't do that. Like that will kill the river and it'll affect the Fraser and we are DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) scientists and employees, and we're telling you not to do that." Well, they got demonized for saying that became known as the dissident scientists, which many of them were, Gordon Hartman and Harold Mundy. There was a group of five of them and they were just... They weren't political men.

**Sean Griffin** [00:54:58] They were among the top flight biologists in the department at the time as I recall.

**Mae Burrows** [00:55:04] Absolutely. I was so lucky to be invited to, sort of social events with them and their families, and it's like listening to a kind of a band riffing with each other. Like one would be talking about oxygen demand and the other would be talking about habitat and the other would be talking about soil stability or something like that. It was just amazing to listen to them. And they were among the tops. And they were silenced - they were silenced. So they're one bunch in this whole thing, the dissident scientists, and I remained friends with Gordon Hartman until he died last year in his 90s. So great friendships were made. But anyway, they wanted to divert not just 57 percent of the water,

but 87 percent of the water out of the river. So that would leave so much damage to the Fraser and damage to the Nechako, plus they were laying off workers at the smelter. So it was not a good situation. And so it became an issue not just ... Like everything is connected... That's the beautiful thing about doing work with fish, everything is connected. So people up in Alert Bay and people in Malcolm Island, and Sointula, and all over Vancouver Island as well as everybody up and down the Fraser estuary, had a concern about this. And so we built an amazing coalition that was coast wide as well as Fraser Basin wide, and we did everything we could possibly do to convince -- at that time it was (Premier) Mike Harcourt -- the provincial government to not allow Kemano Completion to go ahead. And this is when we got Rafe Mair involved. I managed to get on his (radio) show, weasel my way on his show, and then he really took the issue on. It was one of his first really big issues that he took on, and he was a very big player in influencing public opinion on this. I'll never forget one time, we were very grateful to Rafe for all of the things that he said and did, and it was convention time. And I had a little car, and we're all going to go over to say thank you to Rafe Mair at the studio. So these five like really large fishermen who got in my car, and it just sunk. We all went over there with various kinds of fish to give him a thank you - it was very nice. So Rafe was a big piece of it. The Environment Committee at the UFAWU, the United Fishermen and Allied Worker's Union, was a big part of it. And then we just had, my goodness, there was something for everybody to hate about that project and we tapped into it. For example, we got some of the pulp unions involved because in those days, dilution is the solution to pollution, so if they're going to have license to put so much pollution in the water, if you take the water away, they're going to have less ability to pollute. So they were against it. The Fish and Game clubs were against it. Local landowner societies were against it - all kinds of environmental groups stepped in.

**Sean Griffin** [00:58:11] As I recall the Local at the smelter was also opposed too.

**Mae Burrows** [00:58:15] Oh, no, no. They had a couple of people -- women's pictures -- on a dartboard I understand - that's what I heard. But we did. Frank McDonnell when he was.... So the Fishermens' Union joined CAW in 1995, I think. And so we actually went up and and met with the local and Loretta Woodcock from CAW, from the airlines, was a very important player in this as well. And we tried to build a relationship with, Rick Belmont was the president of the Smelter's union and we kept the conversation open. So that was that, and we were trying to say to them, "we're trying to help you with your jobs, like they are laying you off and they still have a right to all this water - that's wrong." So anyway, we actually, so, what ended up happening, actually, Gordon Campbell blinked first because he saw public opinion and he said, "oh, I think this should be cancelled." And then very shortly after that Mike Harcourt cancelled it. Yay! Another. It was a victory. You know, God knows what's going on up there now because you only win in the moment. But we've won in that moment.

**Sean Griffin** [00:59:32] As I recall, there was a news conference in which Mike Harcourt actually announced this and pointed to you as one of the leading lights in the campaign.

**Mae Burrows** [00:59:40] Yeah, it was a very nice -- one of my happy, happy time press conferences. Yes.

**Sean Griffin** [00:59:51] And the second one was?

**Mae Burrows** [00:59:52] Well another campaign that I think was very successful was our sewage campaign. So I was really looking to see what the sources of pollution were in the

Fraser estuary in particular. It was so interesting because there's this...and this is kind of what carbon trading is like... It doesn't get rid of the pollution, it just allows people to move it around, but it's the same amount of pollution. But that's a bit of a different topic. But I'd look at the pollution permits - like you were permitted to put pollution in the Fraser estuary, and if you looked at those pollution permits and dotted them, say, in the estuary here, pretty soon you might just as well get a crayon and colour it all in because there's so many pollution permits, there was no ecosystem possibility. There's no sense of that capacity. But as ... and I was kind of wanting to finger the pulp mills, which didn't really invest in effluent technology and treatment. And we worked really closely with Dolores Broten and Jay Ritchlin and Reach for Unbleached to try to get Zero AOX, which I don't think we ever achieved, for pulp mill effluent going into the water.

**Mae Burrows** [01:01:08] But I noticed that really the biggest polluters were all the municipalities up and down the Fraser, including the GVRD (Greater Vancouver Regional District - now Metro Vancouver) and Annacis, and at Clark Drive in one of the combined sewage outfalls, and Lulu Island. And then out at - what's the one out at the airport - Iona. So all of these .... and then you go up the Fraser and there's all these municipalities putting raw sewage in the water - Not just barely the thick stuff taken off the top, and none of the chemicals and none of the tertiary treatment, none of that. So it was that era.

**Mae Burrows** [01:01:44] And by the way, I just want to bring this in, because a really important piece of history for the United Fishermen & Allied Worker's Union was a fellow named Tatsuro Buck Suzuki. And I know the Labour Heritage Centre has done work on him and he is just to be honoured and admired because in the '50s he was doing work around sewage going into the Fraser and he was doing marsh reclamation work during that time, and that's how he got the name "Gumboot Suzuki" so this was something of great interest to the membership of the Fishermens' Union that there was raw sewage going into the water and so we did things like we worked very closely with Laurie McBride and the Georgia Straight Alliance and Greg McDade and David Boyd of Sierra Legal Defence. And back in those days, what you could do is.... The Federal Fisheries Act said that any agent or body that is putting "substances deleterious to fish in receiving waters" could face criminal charges. So we sued the GVRD, and they started the process of upgrading the sewage. And then they - the mayors, of course, who all make up the GVRD, the Greater Vancouver Regional District at that time- now it's Metro Vancouver. But that body, that council, the mayors, voted. So then we went for it. We did Annacis and Clark Drive and we got some progress on both of those through this lawsuit, plus a lot of public education - a lot of public pressure. Like we would say things like "if every single family in the GVRD just didn't buy one large pizza a year for five years, we'd have enough money for that sewage treatment plant", which is pretty compelling, I think, really. And so we won, you know, we won those.

**Mae Burrows** [01:03:39] And then there was - it was Lulu, the Lulu plant, and only two mayors voted in favour of the budget to upgrade it. And so we put out a press release after their meeting like, let's say the meeting was on a Monday or Tuesday, we put out a press release, say, on the Tuesday. And what we were going to do, with Sierra Legal Defence's help, which is now called Eco Justice, we were going to charge individually each of the mayors that voted in favour of putting substances deleterious to fish in receiving waters. And guess what happened by Saturday? They called an emergency meeting -- because we were saying we're going to name them, we're going to charge them criminally, we'll meet them downtown when their court case happens....

**Sean Griffin** [01:04:28] You had a legal basis for doing that?

**Mae Burrows** [01:04:28] Oh, absolutely. Yeah. It used to strike me as so weird when I would do these charges. Of course, we went downtown and made a ruckus, but the courthouse on Main Street is where most of this took place. And it just seems so odd that there'd be all these poor people getting federal charges or, like they were in a brawl or something or who knows what. I mean, there were some really sad people in the courtrooms. And then Peter Leask, the lawyer for the GVRD is there facing federal charges, because we could do that. And so anyway, they reversed their decision by Saturday, and they voted to upgrade the Lulu, and now it's - there's still problems with it, and I still don't think the Victoria has been done. You know, and it's like, what is this? We would say "you can't treat the Fraser as a great big toilet".

**Sean Griffin** [01:05:21] But certainly it's gone a long way in terms of upgrading, and that really sort of started the process.

**Mae Burrows** [01:05:26] Absolutely. And people forget that, I mean I recently, a year or so ago, heard a bunch engineers sort of going, "oh, you know, we worked on the upgrade" and it's like "oh man, you came waaay later... And you got paid for it - big time."

**Bailey Garden** [01:05:43] So do you know if those charges still exist?

**Mae Burrows** [01:05:47] Well I think they've changed the Federal Fisheries Act, so you can't do that. I think that was something (Prime Minister) Harper did. But in those days, it was Section 35.2: Substances Deleterious to Fish.

**Sean Griffin** [01:05:59] Now, it has to be substances deleterious to a "fishery". But the other thing is, at that time, as I recall you would put those charges forward, but then the province's prosecution department would take them over and often would just drop them or stay them.

**Mae Burrows** [01:06:18] Yeah, that happened pretty well every single time.

**Sean Griffin** [01:06:22] The impact was there nonetheless....

**Mae Burrows** [01:06:23] The impact was there. And I always .... one time it was Moe Sihota, Halsey-Brandt and Brian Tobin; the boys that I was dealing with. So like Minister Environment level in B.C. and Halsey-Brandt at the GVRD level and Brian Tobin (federal). So really. And their lawyer staff would say that it's unseemly for one level of government to be suing another, so they'd take the charges away, even though the charges had a "substantial" -- that's the criteria -- a substantial possibility of prosecution. And we met the standard. We met the standard every single time. They'd say, "you met the standard, but it's political."

**Sean Griffin** [01:07:12] You were also at this time - the Environment Committee from the UFAWU - was also part of the Vancouver & District Labour Council's Environment Committee, which was working on a number of things at this time as well. Who were some of the other players in that - Do you recall?

**Mae Burrows** [01:07:29] Well, my best buddy there was from CAW, Roger Crowther, and he was representing CAW on the Labour Council. John Fitzpatrick was the president or secretary treasurer? They did it funny that... you know.



**Sean Griffin** [01:07:45] I can't remember when they changed that....

**Mae Burrows** [01:07:46] So "Fitz" was part of it. Donalda was on it -- Donalda Greenwell-Baker was on it. Ken? Ken from CUPE...

**Sean Griffin** [01:08:03] Ken Davidson?

**Mae Burrows** [01:08:06] Ken Davidson was really a big player. Wayne Peppard was a big player from the building trades, yeah. It was it was a very interesting Labour Council. I mean, the history of how the Labour Council came into being and the split between the New Westminster & District Labour Council (NWDLC) and the Vancouver & District Labour Council (VDLC) is very interesting. And I actually have some letters that follow that up and resolutions that follow that up. What you can situate there is that there was a controversy about logging in the drinking watershed and Capilano watersheds here in Metro Vancouver. And there was a group of people that did not want that logging and were really protecting the water source. And there was a group that wanted logging and they broke away and -- logging in metro Vancouver -- and they broke away and formed the New Westminster & District Labour Council, which I eventually became very good friends with, too. Carolyn Chalifoux-Rice - and they eventually --the New Westminster & District Labour Council eventually nominated me for a United Way Labour Appreciation Award. But there was some tension over the years between the New West and Vancouver & District Labour Council.

**Sean Griffin** [01:09:22] But that particular issue that was long gone before.

**Mae Burrows** [01:09:25] Yeah, but not that much before I got there.

**Sean Griffin** [01:09:28] But you were also nominated this at time for your work on environment through for the CLC's environmental award.

**Mae Burrows** [01:09:35] Yeah. One of the things that happened is that the Vancouver & District Labour Council - John Fitzpatrick and Roger Crowther nominated me for the Canadian Labour Congress Environmentalist of the Year, (holds photo) which was an award that made me feel very proud to be appreciated or acknowledged for that work that we did collectively. And it was really, I think, very much situated in the work of the Environment Committee and the Fishermens' Union. I see this as a Fishermens' Union award.

**Sean Griffin** [01:10:14] Do you recall what year that was?

**Mae Burrows** [01:10:18] 1995 - Yep. And oh the other part of it is that it put me in touch with one of my all-time heroes of forever. (Holds photo) This is very hard to see, but this is Brother Dick Martin who at that time was the secretary treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Ken Georgetti was the president, and Dick is one of the most amazing strong people in my work life. He comes from a steelworker background in Manitoba, was president of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. He was very exposed as a steelworker during his work life so he had a real strong penchant for union health and safety. But he also had a very, very strong voice and worked hard to bring environmentalists and labour together for the benefit of both, and he did that at the highest level of the Canadian Labour Congress. And he did some amazing things. He died. He was very supportive of the formation of the Labour Environmental Alliance. And died far too young from an occupational exposure. It's a tragedy.

**Sean Griffin** [01:11:36] And that occupational exposure (unclear).

**Mae Burrows** [01:11:36] So, yeah, people die far too soon. And so this was really -- it was an award for the Fishermens' Union for the work that we had collectively done and recognition at the CLC for that, which I think was really good given the Fishermens' Union at that time we had just joined CAW, but we were a small provincial union and quite different than the union on the East Coast in terms of our activities and so on. So I think that was a really nice recognition. And then it was the beginning of starting to meet some of the people at the Canadian Labour Congress, like Dick Martin and Dave Bennett, who was the staff person who did fabulous work that started blending health and safety and environment together, because really they're very connected. Just as protecting fish habitat and Fishermens' jobs is very connected.

**Sean Griffin** [01:12:31] But this is also a time when the sort of the first rumblings of the "war in the woods" as it was coined by the forest companies was starting.

**Sean Griffin** [01:12:37] And the Vancouver & District Labour Council's Environment Committee started bringing - itself bringing - environmentalists and trade unionists together to talk about these issues.

**Mae Burrows** [01:12:48] Yeah, well, you know, so in the '90s, there was very much a corporate sponsored, corporate incited, so-called workers versus environmentalists war in the woods. And they did, rather than taking responsibility for forest practices that were not going to be sustainable, they got people really, really fighting each other. So Roger Crowther and I were co-chairs of the Environment Committee at the Vancouver & District Labour Council. One of our members, Lyle Fenton, who was a rail worker up in Squamish. He was also working on sewage improvements in that area, so he was seen as an environmentalist. And his daughter got sexually explicit hate mail and his wife was told to get out of town and he was being threatened. So we really felt that it was one of our members. And what he was doing was trying to keep water in Squamish clean, but we needed to start doing something so we decided that one of the ways to deal with this so-called war was to bring people together. I mean, how logical is that? So we convened the very first meeting of the Labour Environmental Alliance (LEAS) and Svend Robinson graciously chaired the first meeting and we invited as many people from the environmental community as well as the labour community who wanted to work together.

**Mae Burrows** [01:14:22] Our strategy was to bring together people that wanted to work together and that we would then expand - and people that wanted to keep the fight going would get increasingly marginalized instead of holding centre stage. So that was our strategy.

**Sean Griffin** [01:14:39] So that initial meeting was what year?

**Mae Burrows** [01:14:39] Oh, boy, I would think '98ish. And I'm not sure about that altogether, maybe '97. And Svend, of course, was known at that time. I think he was an MP at that time still.... Yes, he was. And of course, he had participated in the Clayoquot Sound demonstrations, so he had shown his environmental strengths already by then. And our meetings, I mean, the purpose of the meetings was -- what we used to call it, what we used to say was, we used to frame it as "creating an opportunity for positive and constructive dialogue between environmentalists and labour." So that's what our slogan

was sort of thing, and again, it was a little bit off the side of the desk because we had other duties.

**Mae Burrows** [01:15:33] David Lane and I. I primarily organized the meetings and Roger would chair them. And, my goodness, it went on for several years and we'd hold them at the Maritime Labour Centre, which gave us the space to meet in and we would have specific topics. So, for example, one of the first topics that drew us together was, that was during the times of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) - one of the trade deals that was going to equally harm the environment and workers - it was not a good deal for either - so we should have a natural affinity for that. And so indeed, we found a number of unions that wanted to sign on. CEP was very big. UFAWU, BCGEU, CUPE... several unions. Those are some of the core ones. HEU. And then others, and then a number of environmental groups. So that was our first sort of public action. We took out a big newspaper ad that said that "we stand together and we stand against these trade agreements which are not helpful to our communities, be they workers or the environment". And so the process was... And then the other thing that we did was, because there was so much conflict around, was to try to develop protocols and strategies for working, for struggling with conflict.

**Mae Burrows** [01:17:01] And we came up with a set of principles that Sam Gindin wrote. I'm getting ahead of myself a bit here because so many things were happening at once. So on the one hand, what was really positive about them, the monthly was held on the first or third Wednesday of every month, and it would be all morning, and the Vancouver & District Labour Council provided us with food in the morning, and then the Maritime Labour Centre had a nice lunch that people could participate in afterwards, so there was a social aspect to it. I mean, at the very beginning, it was almost like...

**Sean Griffin** [01:17:38] Any idea of how many people would be involved in those early forums?

**Mae Burrows** [01:17:42] Really 30-50 people, like regularly 30 people. So we'd be everybody from FarmFolk/CityFolk to the Sierra Club to Reach from Bleach to Burns Bog to so many different environmental, grassroots environmental organizations and the BC Environmental Network who was at that time - the executive director Anne-Marie Sleeman played a really big role in this as well, because at that time the environmental movement was very much a grassroots movement and not what it's now become, which is a corporate paid, professional bunch that have been handpicked by the funder to represent us. It was a very democratic movement.

**Mae Burrows** [01:18:26] And so lots of environmentalists would come, and at first it was like people were really edgy with each other because they didn't know each other and they didn't trust each other. And they'd been fuelled to hate each other and fight each other and so on. So it's a bit like having a snake in the room and just desensitizing people to it in little bits and pieces. And then they get a communication list and be able to call each other and they formed friendships over lunch. And they had further conversations after the meetings. So there was a social aspect to it that was really important, and that saw so many unions and environmental groups starting to work together. So that was part of it. And another part was we would have topics that would have a panel. The panels were well structured, knowledgeable people. The panels was well structured. The people were knowledgeable. They would present different points of view and then there would be really civilized discussion. And people would really come to realize that they probably had 90 percent or 95 percent in common. And they could isolate what they didn't agree on and they could

agree to disagree in a civil way so not blindsiding each other in the media, as was happening with the fight. And then you can also sort of work to get more information to find out what to do with that 5 percent. And then we'd have a go around and everybody would report what their issues were like 8 Mile Ranch or forestry issues or whatever. And then we'd have a part on strategies for working together. So it was...

**Mae Burrows** [01:20:12] The list of topics were fascinating. We had one on privatization, like, what do we have in common around privatization? We tried to find common ground. And so Fred Muzin from the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) was talking about privatization of elder health care. George Heyman was there from -- he was president of the BCGEU at that time - and he was talking about what he called passive privatization, which was the deregulation and de-funding of people in the forest industry. And so we would ... There'd be five speakers and we'd all focus on that topic of privatization and try to understand what we had in common with it.

**Mae Burrows** [01:20:55] So there's the MAI, there was privatization. We did a lot of work on the media and the Fraser Institute and Project Censored; like how is the mainstream media manipulating our various voices in campaigns and what can we do about it and so on. So we'd have those kind of conversations, so pretty exciting. And it went on for about five years off the side of our desk.

**Sean Griffin** [01:21:22] So when was the decision made to make an organization out of this cooperation?

**Mae Burrows** [01:21:24] Well, I think that ... so this is 1998. So I think that Svend probably chaired the first meeting, maybe in '97. And then Sam Gindin stepped in from the CAW. He was a key staff person at the CAW and we came up with his points. He came up with a number of points of struggling, how to struggle collectively with conflict. And then we had this conference at Sorrento, which was 1998. So first came the environment basic principles for struggling with conflict. So this would be the kind of thing we would talk about in a very forthright way. So he brought this in, but we adopted it. Barry O'Neill for instance was talking about privatization of municipal services. So it was real... I mean, it was Will Horter, Lisa Matheus from privatization on public land with regard to forest practices. So that was the privatization workshop.

**Mae Burrows** [01:22:35] Here is the basic principles for struggling with conflict: the environment is not an issue involving others; It's a public health issue. It's a community issue. It's for the kids. It's for the next generation. So we would think about do we want to adopt that principle? And we did. So we'd say environmental issues can't be separated from the economic system we live in. And, surely to God, we know that now, but we're not doing much about it.

**Mae Burrows** [01:23:03] You know, we get so distracted with the millennials versus the boomers, and the one percenters are laughing their heads off at us. So that's a point. Our economic system divides us re: our concerns over jobs versus our concerns over the environment. So we would talk about what does that look like and what can we do to ameliorate it and find common ground? It's was all about finding where's the commonality, the "minimum basis of unity", some people might have said in those days. Because that's where we're coming from. And that we can learn from our experience for health and safety, and this set the stage for the next 10 years of our work, which was really working with health and safety committees to do environmental change.

**Mae Burrows** [01:23:45] And then tensions will occur, and we must think strategically in dealing with them, not careening around, blindsiding each other, wrecking Fishermens' nets in the Fraser River, but find ways to deal with them that doesn't mean working people are harmed and doesn't mean that scars so deep are left that they'll never heal. So that's what we're really getting at.

**Mae Burrows** [01:24:09] And then in 1997 or 1998, we had a fabulous conference. There were people like Gordie Larkin and all kinds of people from the CLC and from different unions and different environmental groups. And it was up at Sorrento, at the conference centre in Sorrento, and it was co-sponsored by the B.C. Environmental Network and the Labour Environmental Committee of the VDLC, and it was about strengthening alliances.

**Sean Griffin** [01:24:43] Would you say that conference was sort of the direct link to the formation of the Labour Environmental Alliance?

**Mae Burrows** [01:24:49] I mean, yeah, the formation had been starting to happen with years of the labour environmental forums, and I was still working for the Fishermens' Union, and then what started happening in about 1999, I did get some funding to start the Labour Environmental Alliance on a very small, like \$20,000. And so then that was the beginning of us, of me transitioning out of the Fishermens' Union and starting to raise funds explicitly for the Labour Environmental Alliance Society. And I think we became a registered society and charity in about 1999 with a huge board.

**Sean Griffin** [01:25:32] Maybe you could show us the photo of the board, which is kind of interesting the representation on the board.

**Mae Burrows** [01:25:42] (Holds photo) Well, we'd have these great meetings. This one - 2002 probably. So we'd have first of all, the labour environment, the monthly VDLC meetings would range from 30 people to 70 people. We had fantastic turnout, you know, so that was that. And then we had a board. We were allowed to, as a non-profit and a charity, have a board up to 20 people. And what we always tried to maintain was a board of 20 environmental groups and 20 unions, which is pretty cool, really. Although there was some social justice groups in there as well. So here's a picture of one board. (Holds Photo) So we'd have these board meetings and you know, we deal with incredibly contentious topics, but we come out the other end, unified. It was ... because the building trades were here, you know. So who's here? Darryl Walker from the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, Ananda Lee Tan, you know, who's done a lot of international work on just transition and organizing you know, people of colour around environmental issues and social justice issues. Herb Barbolet from the FarmFolk/CityFolk. Wayne Peppard from the BC & Yukon Building Trades. David Cadman from SPEC, Patrick Robertson (the mayor's little brother) he was representing the B.C. Teachers' Federation, Harold Monroe from CEP, Loretta Woodcock from CAW Airlines. Ana Rahmat from HEU. Larry Stoffman from the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) 1518 it just went on -- Cliff Stainsby here. This isn't even all the board.

**Mae Burrows** [01:27:43] That's only 16, so there's probably a few people missing that night. But the board evolved and was always just really committed people and it was public and private sector. You know - it was it was the Nurses' Union at one point. It was the Steelworkers at one point, it was a really, really strong voice that they then took back to their own unions and were able to engage their members in similar campaigns such as around chemicals in the workplace. So that's where the evolution of that started to happen as well.

**Mae Burrows** [01:28:20] Well, I understand the first campaign that you began - Cleaners and Toxins I think it was called. (Yes) Actually emerged from the shore plants in UFAWU.

**Mae Burrows** [01:28:31] Yeah, so that was probably 1999 or maybe even 2000. The fishing industry had been so attacked by area licensing and by a number of economic kind of issues. The federal government was really out to make sure that there wasn't a unified voice on the coast, let me put it that way. And so the fishermen who used to be the main people who came to the environment committee meetings were really off doing other critical activities. And so at this particular convention, who really showed up a lot was the various... pretty well all women ... from northern canneries and canneries here in Ucluelet and (Prince) Rupert and (Port) Hardy and Vancouver here and so on. And they're primarily women of different ethnic minorities and their conversation at that -- because we always took direction from our committees. It wasn't like we just dreamed up something and went and got funding for it. We listened to our members. That's the whole participatory model again -- And what these women were talking about is ... what their thing was that they didn't clean enough in the canneries, there wasn't enough of that practice. And when the cleaners came through, sometimes the smells and the chemicals themselves were so harsh that it either hurt their throats or caused some rashes. So there you go, right smack into right to know, right to participate, right to refuse exposures to harsh hazardous chemicals in the workplace. And also, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that if you're putting all these harsh chemicals in the workplace and they're washed straight into the salt chuck that you're hurting fish habitat. So that's really where the Cleaners and Toxins and Toxic Free Canada and everything else was birthed is with that lovely group of women cannery workers.

**Sean Griffin** [01:30:38] So how did you first begin that campaign?

**Mae Burrows** [01:30:44] Well, I have to acknowledge that Sean Griffin and I -- by this time, were working very closely together and we had a really compatible kind of working relationship where Sean, who was so good at doing research and good at writing books and pamphlets and so on, would do that aspect of it and I would sort of do the schmooze part and go to different talks and start working with the membership. And so what together we did, Sean Griffin and I, was one of the -- well, two -- of the really early ones were school custodians because we had a really good working relationship with CUPE. We always had a CUPE vice president on our board at all times, and so we had access to both the CUPE environment meetings and health and safety meetings. And so started meeting some of the people who were school custodians and Sean would work with them and look at the various cleaners that they were using. And many of them had reproductive toxins in them, or carcinogens or endocrine disrupting chemicals. And so we would identify those and then find substitutes. And it would be a very kind of collegial, collective kind of research project. We showed them how to read the material safety data sheets so that they could continue to do this research on their own. We'd get the buy-in of their unions so that they could then get the buy-in of their employers, and boy, Hospital Employees' Union really, really took this up. The B.C. Teachers' Federation took this up, the Nurses' Union took this up. And I believe that over the course of time, by getting health and safety activists, who actually look a lot like environmental activists if you take a close look, they got rid of thousands and thousands of litres of hazardous chemicals that were going into the receiving waters because they exercised their workplace rights to know, to participate and to refuse exposure to hazardous chemicals.

**Sean Griffin** [01:33:03] You even got recognized at one point by the Council of Ministers of the Environment.

**Mae Burrows** [01:33:09] It was Sean and I went to a very pooh-bah affair in Edmonton where we were indeed recognized by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. And I think what caught their eye about this project is the participatory nature of it, the way in which not only did we meet them where they're at, in their workplaces and what are their issues and their working conditions and what are the barriers for them to make change and how do they get the power to make that change, but also showing them how to do the research and finding safe substitutes for them. So that's a very nice package. And it's an unusual award for a grassroots organization to give. It's usually given to national hotels or something like that, you know, who throw in the towel or whatever. So it was very nice. It was a very good award.

**Sean Griffin** [01:34:03] On the basis of it was pollution prevention.

**Mae Burrows** [01:34:06] Oh, yes, it's very much pollution prevention if you're getting chemicals out of the receiving environment. What we used to say is, "you don't have to give everything up - You just have to change your habits and your products and have some knowledge about it."

**Mae Burrows** [01:34:22] But I'm just going to bring both Bob Sass in here, too, because one of the people I got to meet along the way was somebody that's very important in Canadian history and his name is Bob Sass, and he comes from a Central European Jewish background, and he had the accent to go with it. As a young man he was a window washer in New York City and became president of the window washer union and eventually worked his way into the Saskatchewan government, and became really known as the father of the "right to know, right to participate in, right to refuse movement" in health and safety in Canada. And so right to know is right to know what you're exposed to. So you can see the material safety data sheets. You can understand what the process is. You have that right to know and understand what your exposure is. You have a right to participate in how that's decided and what's done with the decisions. And you actually have a right to refuse. There is refusal that's in WorkSafeBC, for instance. And there's also a right to no discrimination from reporting this, although that's harder to enforce because, as Bob pointed out, he said two things. One is that his right to participate didn't mean sitting on a little committee where you had your seat and then there was management all around and they're running the show. What he meant was a much bigger piece of the right to organize your work environment... the right to organize your schedules, right to participate in how your work takes place, which is far more radical than the little committee work, although committees are really important, I won't slag them.

**Mae Burrows** [01:36:08] But one of the best quotes from Bob Sass, so he took he grew uncomfortable with a right to participate in how it's being practiced at a certain point. And he would say things like .... So we would say "right to know gives you knowledge and knowledge is power". And Bob, in his accent which I can't do, would say, "No: knowledge is knowledge. Power is power" and that's what he was going for in the workplace, really. We didn't totally achieve that.

**Sean Griffin** [01:36:46] But you obviously were getting a lot of attention beyond the Rockies.

**Mae Burrows** [01:36:49] Oh, yeah.

**Sean Griffin** [01:36:51] Were there national unions and others that were taking up some of this work together with Labour Environmental Alliance?

**Mae Burrows** [01:36:56] Yeah. So we went on very long, it was about a decade of overusing the airline and using up any carbon possibility of not having a footprint. So we, Sean, Larry Stoffman was really important in this, and Ana Rahmat -- Larry Stoffman from UFCW 1518 and Ana Rahmat from HEU and Sean Griffin and - Gee we went to so many union conventions, like when they would have their workshops and we would be the ones that would deliver the workshop on hazardous chemicals. And I just can't even -- I've sort of tried to figure out -- was it 100 workshops that we did? But, it was an awful lot of workshops. And the other thing that was quite magical about it -- and this is the beauty of working with whoever the grassroots are -- because, for instance, let me just take CUPE as an example. Well, because they were very - and CAW - they were very involved in the Labour Environmental Alliance and our activities, so then their representatives that would come to the Labour Environmental Alliance would be on the executive of their boards and would then go and get these kind of programs being put in place in places in Ontario and Manitoba and all over the place. So it's a really good way of spreading the word because you're using your networks.

**Sean Griffin** [01:38:23] So it was really amplifying the voice of the organization.

**Mae Burrows** [01:38:26] Yeah. And we also played a really important role at the CLC table on environment and labour issues, but on environment at the CLC table when Dick was secretary treasurer. And we also played an important role at the CLC level in terms of health and safety and as well as the national unions. And so one of the things I want to say about the CLC table was, now the soup of the day, you see it in various magazines and stuff, is to talk about Just Transition. And it's sort of become... I don't really know what it means. It's kind of like say I'm a feminist or something - it means so many different things. It means justice. It means everything from we need a just society, and we need to reconcile with Indigenous people - all of those things are really important. But it started as a just transition program to try to make it so that workers weren't as threatened if you're talking about their jobs, which were going to be disproportionately affected by, environmental changes, be that like a really classy example would be like a CEP certification for a chemical factory or something and the chemical was banned so the factory has to shut down. Those workers should not have to disproportionately bear the brunt of all of that. And that town shouldn't have to disproportionately bear the brunt of that. So actually at the CLC table, and there were so many different points of view represented there because it was public and private sector - because some had a very industrial base to them and so on, we did manage to .... I mean, here is the first -- I knew those boxes in the basement would come in handy some day -- The first Just Transition Working Group report to the CLC Executive Council, November 1998 (Holds copy) This is where it started, folks. Good principles in it, and it was eventually adopted and I think it still stands as a policy to be a pretty good just transition policy. It's got some of the practicalities, because sometimes just transition just means somebody gets to go and educate himself to be in a different trade or profession - that could be considered just transition. Or, people would like to say, oh, those industrial workers should work on hemp farms. Well, that's not going to happen so much because you've got to also appreciate that people have particular skills and backgrounds and predilections about what they want to do. But we were trying to be anticipatory. That was the main thing that we were talking about in 1998. If you don't start just transition like, right now, you're not going to anticipate the displacements that are going to happen. And did we do it? Not so much.



**Sean Griffin** [01:41:40] So this really was a good plan that never got implemented because of the constraints on it?

**Mae Burrows** [01:41:47] Well, the constraints on it. And, are you going to get oil companies to transition themselves out of their business - "beyond petroleum", not so much. And we have a neoliberal, deregulated government and that's something we should be really focusing on a lot more, because you can't -- if you can't intervene in the economic system, you're not going to get transition programs because you don't own the means of production. Unions don't own the means of production, so unions can be all for just transition, but they have no power, as Bob would say.

**Sean Griffin** [01:42:28] The real constraint was power...

**Mae Burrows** [01:42:32] Yes, power is always an inhibiting factor if you don't have it.

**Sean Griffin** [01:42:35] Getting back to a more mundane subject, you noted that when you were in occupational health and safety workshops and whatnot, a lot of those people would look at what they were doing in the workplace and then say, how can we do this at home and whatnot. Was this sort of the genesis of one of the bigger projects - the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide?

**Mae Burrows** [01:42:56] Yeah. Again, this is a really partnership piece of work that Sean Griffin and I did, along with all of our board and our members. And it was just as going from the Fishermens' Union, looking after environment and habitat to then, worker health and safety and hazardous chemicals, we started looking at the consumer products that contain things like carcinogens and reproductive toxins. And Sean researched and wrote a beautiful guide called the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide, which did a whole range of consumer topics and used the methodology that we had developed in the health and safety movement of right to know, right to participate in, right to refuse. The right to refuse, of course was "don't buy it." But if we don't have right to know labelling, how would we ever know what's in the products? And we still don't have right to know labelling although my MP Peter Julian introduced right to know labelling laws on two occasions based on our work, and I really appreciate him doing it. He's one of the MPs that really listens to his constituents. But it was enormously successful. Everybody wanted to know what was in their hairspray and their nail polish and their cleaning products and all of those kind of things. And it also embraced a kind of -- we had a little campaign that was student's environmental bill of rights, like what are students being exposed to in their shop classes? Just as we would want to get workers to know that ... or their art classes. And the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide, my goodness, one year.... oh, I don't know, we pretty well ran a whole staff position on the revenue from selling the guides for \$10 bucks each. It was phenomenal. And Wendy Mesley...

**Sean Griffin** [01:44:50] Maybe you can talk to the Wendy Mesley show, which was an interesting aspect of the amplification of this whole issue.

**Mae Burrows** [01:45:01] At the time Wendy Mesley was doing (CBC) Marketplace and she had breast cancer. And she's saying, "What? What's the deal here? I eat healthy, I exercise, I do everything right, and I've still got cancer."

**Mae Burrows** [01:45:17] So her show, she did a beautiful documentary called Chasing the Cancer Answers. And she went all around the world to try to meet up with organizations

that were trying to prevent cancer, not just find treatments for it and so on, but to prevent exposures both in the home, at childhood ages and in the community, because of a lot of the discharges that go into the community are causing cancer, and in the workplace. So she did this really sympathetic video, and one of the things that she said in it is that -- and she's so elegant, you know, dressed and everything -- she said "I found that there was this whole army of activists out there that are trying to prevent cancer; fighting cancer by prevention." And so she interviewed me. She interviewed people like Jim Brophy, who was doing some excellent work on preventing cancer, some CAW people and then other people. And oh, my God, it was one of the most popular, most replayed shows of Marketplace's history.

**Mae Burrows** [01:46:28] And that's partly where we got just really thousands of requests for the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide. And it was us putting them in the envelopes and trying to find mailboxes that weren't already stuffed. Yeah, it was very grassroots, but we sure got that out there and you know what? I would meet people... Like I go over to the (Vancouver) Island still quite a bit and I would meet people from one of the Gulf Islands and she'd say "I saw the show and now I feel so empowered." And I'd think, good. I'm glad you do. That's how you should feel.

**Sean Griffin** [01:47:08] Did it also lead to sort of new connections with other cancer societies and so on?

**Mae Burrows** [01:47:13] Yeah. Well, so another thing, somebody did a show on the Canadian Cancer Society and kind of focused on their CEO's salary. And so there's bit of sourness there, and so they actually got in touch with me, the board of the Canadian Cancer Society. I was "soup of the day" and they wanted me at the table. So, I thought it would be a way of getting more power, more connections, more network, but they really...I have to say that they really tried to appropriate and absorb a lot of the grassroots work that we did. We did get some profile for our issues by doing that, but it was very instrumental in my view, on their part. So that's all I'll say about it. I mean, we did get a lot of amplification, but it's a really large corporation and the CEO does make too much money.

**Sean Griffin** [01:48:15] So I presume also at this time, that focus on this particular part of the work of toxic hazardous chemicals in the environment and in consumer and workplace world led to the change in the name from Labour Environmental Alliance to Toxic Free Canada?

**Mae Burrows** [01:48:30] Right. So now we're .... see the Wendy Mesley show was 2006, and so 2006 to 2008 were pretty powerful prevent cancer networks and there was a whole great big conference, a national conference on preventing cancer, and a whole movement that started with preventing cancer. And that was very powerful. At that time, somewhere around that time, we decided that we had more, I suppose empathy or something, because toxins are a federal issue that we should be looking at it from a national perspective. And so we changed our name, and we were not having the same health and safety connectors as we used to. We still had a board that was full of union people but we changed our name to Toxic Free Canada. That was hard, and on reflection there. I think for one thing, it was over our reach to try to work at a national level with an office in Vancouver, because a lot of the national organizations are sort of like: "you are from where? Is that even more further west than Alberta?" So it wasn't necessarily, in my view, the best move. But it did reflect we had a very strong voice in a strong place on the national scene in terms of law, trying to get a law on right to know and speaking on it. And, the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide and that sort of thing.

**Mae Burrows** [01:50:15] But this is taking to the next place, so we're now at..... So Wendy Mesley was 2006, and 2007 and 2008 were really good, but then that little depression happened where all kinds of unions lost their membership, and our funding came from a whole healthy variety of sources, from personal donations to lots of unions supported us or paid us to do workshops or bought the Cancer Smart Consumer Guide. We got grants, but Health Canada was under Harper's rule and so they certainly weren't doing community based things, and I think Environment Canada entirely stopped funding, and Health Canada didn't fund very much. So it was that time when all kinds of unions faced a lot of attrition and with a lot of the funding sources that we used to get like from VanCity or Vancouver Foundation, because there was also, in British Columbia, the Liberals were also de-funding a lot of things that Vancouver Foundation, for instance, or VanCity had to pick up. And so the funding just got tighter and tighter and tighter. And honestly, I spent three decades looking under every rock in Canada trying to find funding. And boy, I'd worn out my welcome on those rocks by that time and we just really got hit by that 2008. So by 2010, it was clear what was going to happen, it was just really minor part-time work with Sean and I. And the cynics' expectations would have been there for us. So we did let Toxic Free Canada lay down.

**Mae Burrows** [01:52:07] I do want to say one thing that I did do, with the Canadian Cancer Society that was really powerful, and what we engaged on was a really good campaign to stop the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides because they're are clear carcinogens. Clearly, many of the pesticides contain carcinogens. They're very threatening to children's health, to adults' health. They're not necessary. And we did a really good, oh, a really good bunch of tours and went to the UBCM (Union of BC Municipalities). And went all over British Columbia with the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and Toxic Free Canada and the Canadian Cancer Society. And in many municipalities we won because it's the municipalities that can limit the sale of pesticides -- no, they can limit the use -- but it's only the province that can limit the sale. And one of the largest citizen engaged consultations that the government, the Liberal government, had was people coming and speaking about the province putting in a law to ban the sale of cosmetic pesticides. And Bill Bennett was chairing that consultation and didn't really like our nanny statements about being in everybody's yard. So we didn't win that one.

**Sean Griffin** [01:53:34] But they did in Quebec?

**Mae Burrows** [01:53:36] Yeah, they did in Quebec, yep, before us. And so we had the Liberals and that neo-liberal bunch to deal with. But what was powerful about it is that it really was a movement. It really, really was a movement where people really felt engaged and they really educated about it. And I think it changed. I see now that pesticides are locked up and stuff like that in stores as opposed to.... But they are still for sale, which is too bad because they're not necessary.

**Sean Griffin** [01:54:06] And all of this kind of wound before we got to the next labour-environmental divide, really, which was climate change, for instance the oil industry, the fossil fuel industry in general. Just to wrap up here, can I ask you to sort of look back at your younger self and say, what would you do now with the Labour Environmental Alliance, faced with that same sort of situation?

**Mae Burrows** [01:54:32] I have to say, I'd do the same thing, Sean. I think it was a good thing to do. What really irks me right now is; there's two things. One is the corporations are behaving as they have all the way through decade after decade, and that's just fuelling this

fight, which is not workers versus environmentalists. It's not the environment versus - I mean - we're all going to tank together and a lot of people know that. My husband wrote this wonderful book called *The Big Stall*, which is about how corporations have got (Justin) Trudeau, his whole agenda is dictated by the oil and gas corporations. So we're really losing that one and we're losing it because we're divided. Now the people that are representing us are even bragging this week that went over in their fancy suits to COP25 representing me and you. Although I didn't nominate them for anything, but they got corporate funding to go over there and they're the environmental movement. So we lost the grassroots environmental movement in some ways, although there's tremendous resistance coming up among young people, and that's something to be really celebrated and they are not going to put up with it. I don't know how we're going to join workers and environmentalists, but there's a growing crowd that understands we're in crisis, and that can't go on.

**Sean Griffin** [01:56:08] Okay, good. It's time to wrap up I think.