

Interview: Muriel Overgaard (MO)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
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Transcription: Janet Hall

KN [00:00:05] Hey. Good morning and welcome. We're interviewing Muriel Overgaard who was the President of CUPE BC between 1976 and 1980 and had a very eventful and momentous life in the trade union movement. We want to thank you for doing this interview and for having us in your home.

MO [00:00:28] You're very welcome.

KN [00:00:29] Mariel, we just wondered if you could please start by telling us a bit about your family background; where you grew up; what kind of a family you had; did you grow up in a union family; were there progressive ideas in your family that were being discussed? What can you tell us about your family background in your young years, your early years?

MO [00:00:54] We had the best of all lives when I was a child. That was a way back in 1920, so that's a long time ago. There were seven children in our family and my dad worked with the grain elevators and he eventually became superintendent of grain elevators and then into the main office eventually. We lived in different places because he would be transferred. I was born in Elbow, Saskatchewan which is down by the Diefenbaker Dam. We had the river to play in. We'd run out the door in the morning—how my mother ever did it I don't know—we just played on the river all day and it was wonderful. I was the middle child. I had an older brother and an older sister and then there was me. I was five foot ten when I was 12 years old so I was the odd one in the family. I had red hair and I had freckles and I had glasses. Anyway, it was just survival for me and sports were very important. I then became very involved in softball and things like that. That was my saving grace in those days. My family was always there for you. We've been a very close family—no problem at all within our family unit. We've always been very good to each other and for each other. But as far as union no, of course not. Dad was with the Western Grain Elevator. We'd never thought of anything like unions in those days. Then we moved down to a place called Shaunavon, Saskatchewan. That's where I took my high school. My final high school year was in Shaunavon and that's where I became very involved in basketball. I really played a lot of basketball in Shaunavon. I also was a neighbour to the dentist. We lived next door to the dentist and I used to babysit his children all the time, so I ended up working with him in the office eventually. My brother got sent to university and he became an engineer and my sister became a nurse but there was no money left for me. Once more I became the one that had to find something to do myself, but I really had a wonderful life as a young person. I was involved and I usually ended up being the leader in CGI or Girl Guides or whatever. We just had a great time in Shaunavon. I was very involved in basketball as I said. Then my dad got transferred to Moose Jaw and—whether I was going to stay in Shaunavon or not—I went to Moose Jaw with him and I just enrolled in a business college and that's where I joined the Army. After my business college I went and worked at Eaton's for a little while.

KN [00:04:27] Can you go back to the army, you joined the Army?

MO [00:04:30] In 1942.

KN [00:04:31] In '42. Can you tell us a bit about that.

MO [00:04:35] Well, I took my basic training up at Vermillion, Alberta. It was an old school for boys, but we fit in greatly there. We had a lot of fun. It was quite an adventure. I really think I could have done anything I wanted in the Army but before I had gone to Vermillion I fell madly in love with this young guy who had a farm in Saskatchewan so my main interest was to get back. I don't know if you'd understand that but that's what happened. When they asked me what I wanted to do, well I wanted to get back into Della Corps and be in Regina so I'd be close to the farm. And Keith couldn't get into the service because of a small medical problem. We finally got married and the only way I could get out of the army and get to the farm was to get pregnant, so that's what we did. I didn't have a very long term in the Army but ended up on the farm with my son Bob. It was great and then my husband died in 1947 and Bob and I had to start over again.

KN [00:05:58] Bob, what's your son?

MO [00:05:59] Bob was my son. When I first went to the farm I had never lived on a farm so it was a whole new adventure for me. My mother-in-law was very fussy about her home. My father-in-law was an ex-MP in Ottawa and when he retired they came and built this beautiful home. They restored the old house and just made it into the most beautiful place and it was the showplace of the area. I would work a lot with Keith outside which was really good that I did because when he died I was able to do some of the work that had to be done. The year that he died was in '47 and it was in the winter and we were snowed in. You wouldn't believe it, but the snow was up over the windows. In the house you couldn't see out of anything—mounds and mounds of snow. I finally phoned the Undertaker. He was the only person I knew that I thought could get us out of there because Keith was very ill. I phoned the Undertaker and he said, "Well I'll send out an ambulance plane". But it took two weeks before they could even land. When they came Keith was loaded on a toboggan first and taken up. The guys all had to have skis to get in and out of the house. I mean it was something you couldn't even visualize today. The telephone wires and everything were covered in snow. Anyway, they took him to the airplane first and then they came back and got Bob and I. And even to get the airplane off the ground or off the mound of snow, the guy had to stand on the outside ski to get lifted off the ground. We went to Moose Jaw then and that's where Keith died. We were in Moose Jaw then. So what do you do? Keith had a great friend called Ross Thatcher. Well they had a hardware store in Moose Jaw and Ross phoned me one day and he said, "Muriel would you like to come and work at the store while you're trying to find out what you're going to do?" So I did. I went and worked in the hardware store in Moose Jaw. He was such a great help to me. He was with the Commonwealth ...

KN [00:08:55] The CCF. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

MO [00:08:58] He was with the CCF when he got elected and then, of course, he turned Liberal after he became Premier of Saskatchewan. His little brother used to be a little kid running around the store. I remember him. Colin was his name. We stayed there for a little while until I could get things in order and then Bob and I took off and we went down east for a while and I got a job with Imperial Oil.

KN [00:09:27] When you say down east.

MO [00:09:29] Down east, Sarnia, Ontario.

KN [00:09:30] Sarnia. Okay.

MO [00:09:32] I had a sister living in Sarnia, so we went down to Sarnia, Ontario and I got a job with Imperial Oil. But my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law—my mother-in-law in particular—so wanted Bob back. She'd lost her son, she lost her husband and everything was really quite sad. I said okay I'll come for a year. I gave up my job knowing that I could go back and pick up a job anywhere down there. I came out here for a year and I've been here ever since. That's how I got to Victoria.

BG [00:10:11] So you moved right to Victoria then, at that point?

MO [00:10:15] Yes, we came from Ontario to here.

KN [00:10:17] That would have been in the late forties.

MO [00:10:20] But we didn't come directly here we went to the farm. We went by way of the farm because I had all these chickens. I was going into the chicken business on the farm. I had to have something to do. So I had bought about 200 chickens. When we went back to the farm the chickens had survived but they're only about 180 left because they had got through the winter on their own. So what to do with these chickens? We had an old stone boat. I don't know if you know what a stone boat is?

KN [00:11:00] I do.

MO [00:11:00] I hooked it up to the tractor. Took it down to the barn and I had my neighbour come down and teach me how to kill a chicken. How to do it quickly. You slice the throat. I had this lesson and I would kill the chickens, throw them on the boat and take them up to the house. There's no way you could pluck all the chickens so I skinned them, cut them in pieces and put them in jars. We had this great big copper canner and a cookstove and I canned chickens. So when Bob and I came out here, we came out with a car load of canned chickens and that was our fortune. I didn't think I'd ever eat chicken again. Canned chicken is beautiful, you know?

KN [00:11:55] Oh ya.

MO [00:11:55] So that's really how we got here. Bob and I came out in that old Chrysler—1937 Chrysler. We drove through the mountains ourselves.

MO [00:12:03] You drove?

MO [00:12:05] Yeah. You could drive anything in those days.

BG [00:12:09] So what was your first job that you got here in Victoria?

MO [00:12:13] When I got here I worked at the Bay. I got a job in the Accounting Office at the Bay and the woman was just wonderful. She was a woman Personnel Officer which was unusual in those days, but she was a wonderful person. When I spoke to her and told her that I really had to have twenty-two dollars a week. I couldn't live for any less than twenty-two dollars a week. So she gave me twenty-two dollars, but she said, "You'll have to fill this position." I've forgotten the name of the machine. It'll come to me after a while.

MO [00:12:53] You look after your machine?

MO [00:12:55] Well no, we did all the accounting on this special machine. They don't have them anymore, but we had to do all the tapes and stuff like that on this machine. So I said, "Well I can do that" and she said, "You can?" and I said "Yes." I had worked at Eaton's long enough in the grocery department that I had learnt a little bit about this machine. But anyway, they had Shaw Business College here. So I went down and took three days of quick lessons on how to run this machine and back to work on Monday morning. That was how I got my job. I stayed there then until Eaton's were going to open a Mail Order on Eighth Street. Because I had been in the service and I was at Eaton's before I had gone to the service—that was one thing Eaton's did—you had a chance to work for them again after the service, after the war. So I made an application and I got a job there. I went in as assistant manager of the Mail Order. The Manager became a bit of an alcoholic so he disappeared and I was left with the business. I had a staff of about 12. We had a really good business because everybody was using mail orders in those days. That was a big business. Then one day one of the Eaton boys—I've forgotten now which one it was—he came in and he said, "You're going to get a delivery" and he said, "Just play it cool." Then he turned around and walked out. Well, the delivery was three great big delivery trucks for Eaton's. We then found out that they had bought out Spencer's here in Victoria. This is all news to you people because you don't live here. Spencer's used to be the big store where Bay Centre is now downtown and you used to go right from there right across to Government Street. That was our introduction to leaving our little corner and having to go into the big store. But because the accounting system in the Mail Order was so similar to what the whole system was made of, I went into the store to help set up the accounting system in Victoria. But then I didn't want to do that so I just said, no I want to have my own little corner, so we kept our corner and we had our own Mail Order. I was also sent up to Duncan then to help them with their accounting system. Eaton's were very, very good to me. They were very, very good. In fact the Manager—Bob and I were living on Hampshire Road—he had to come down Central Avenue, so Bob and I'd go to Central Avenue and he'd come and pick us up and he'd drop Bob off at school. It was really nice. Eaton's was a really wonderful community. I have happy memories of Eaton's.

BG [00:16:02] If we could just pause for a second. I'm noticing the lights flashing on the microphone, so I'm just going to change the battery really quickly.

MO [00:16:09] (unclear) And he had been in the navy and we had a very good marriage, it was good. He had his own business and he did very well.

MO [00:16:21] So did you continue to work at Eaton's or did you leave Eaton's?

MO [00:16:24] No, I left Eaton's. I wanted to have another child because Bob at this time was getting older and I wanted to have another child. So we had Brenda and bought our first little house for \$7,000 on the right on the Gorge.

MO [00:16:42] On the Gorge.

MO [00:16:44] On the Gorge, yes. I didn't go to work until Brenda was going to kindergarten—her first grade school—then I got a part time job. I'd thought, well I want to work so I went out one day and put my application in at three different places and I got the three jobs. Then I had to decide what I was going to do. So I went to the school district because I thought my hours would work better there because I didn't want to work full time.

That's what I did. I worked with the school district, changing my hours. Every time it got to be 5 hours I'd changed my job and go back to four hours until Brenda got old enough that I felt I could leave her. I work at different things in the School District before I became the Secretary of one of the schools. I became a full time person in 1971 and that was the year also that I was Trustee of the CUPE organization.

KN [00:17:49] When you first worked in the school were you in CUPE then or did CUPE come later?

MO [00:18:01] I was working up in Craigdarroch Castle, which was the school district office at that time. I had a hard time with that because I negotiated my own salary when I went in there. Then I found out that I really was making more money than anybody else around me. I really was bothered by going on in the whole system. Actually to begin with though, CUPE 947 was organized by a guy called Tom Smith—he was a Rep, a great guy. Anyway, we were playing poker one night—we had this poker gang that we played with—and he said, "I need one more person to make enough numbers to make an official Local." He talked me into joining. He was just forming a union at that time. I went to two or three meetings and I was really disturbed with what was going on with the men and everything else. We went through a couple of years and then I said, look, I want to be more involved. I put my name up as president and I became President of the Local and we went from there.

KN [00:19:19] And was that the local for all the people who worked for the school board?

MO [00:19:23] 947 in Victoria, School District 61.

KN [00:19:25] Yeah.

MO [00:19:26] So that was the beginning and they were my support system all through. They were a wonderful support system. When I was Treasurer—I went from Trustee to Treasurer—don't know how I got there, but I did.

KN [00:19:48] Is this Treasurer of the Local or Treasurer of the B.C. Division.

MO [00:19:53] Treasure of the B.C. Division.

KN [00:19:55] So immediately when you became President, you became active in the BC division?

MO [00:20:00] Yes. Well I took on the job as Trustee so I was sent to all these conventions and things like that. A whole new world was opening up around me. You're learning a lot of things that were going on and as Trustee you did have to work with the Treasurer and get involved. We tried then to get the Teachers' Federation involved at that time but they refused to do it. That would be in 1970 or something like that. They wouldn't have anything to do with it. Anyway, I no sooner got to be Treasurer then the whole Province went on strike. Everybody was on strike.

KN [00:20:43] In all the school boards or all of CUPE?

KN [00:20:48] No everywhere, 1004, Kamloops, Kootenays, everybody. You know, we had to do everything manually in those days. There was no such thing as computers. I'd opened the account here at the Imperial Bank down on Hillside and they were not as

cooperative as they could be. I finally told them I had to take the money out. They were really upset but I withdrew all the money out of the bank—the Imperial Bank of Commerce—and went over to the uh, Capital.

KN [00:21:25] The credit union?

MO [00:21:26] Credit Union. We had to do everything. I really didn't know how to handle all this, but I went to 947 and we set up my basement as an office and the girls and the guys came in and they helped me get through all that time. They were wonderful.

RO [00:21:50] For you to do strike pay?

MO [00:21:52] Yeah.

KN [00:21:53] So you had to do strike pay for all these Locals that were on strike?

MO [00:21:55] We had to send the big cheque to the Locals and they dispensed it from there, but we had to do everything centrally and it was all done manually.

KN [00:22:05] And you were responsible for doing that because you were the Treasurer?

MO [00:22:07] That's right.

BG [00:22:09] Do you remember what the issue was that the strike was over at that time?

MO [00:22:12] I just don't remember what it was but I know that it was a hard time for everybody. Everybody was finding that the negotiations just were not working. Then the accreditation—I don't know when the accreditation came in—that's when they took away our Local bargaining units and we had to bargain with groups of people.

KN [00:22:35] Okay.

MO [00:22:36] And of course, they were being paid. They didn't care how long it took. We were on strike and it was very, very difficult.

KN [00:22:43] And this would have been around 1970, '70, '71?

MO [00:22:47] I was Treasurer in 1973 to '75.

KN [00:22:54] Okay. So it was a few years later then?

MO [00:22:56] Three years. Then I became First Vice. I ran then as First Vice-President and that's when I opened up the women's organization.

KN [00:23:07] Okay.

MO [00:23:07] When I was First Vice-President.

KN [00:23:08] Can you talk a bit about the women's organization. What exactly did that involve and were there many women that were involved or what was happening?

MO [00:23:18] At first we had a hard time but I knew that there had to be some changes because it was really controlled by the men. I was the only woman on the division at that time except for one girl from Surrey. Half the time she was not able to come, Vera King, not because she didn't want to but that because of work and they wouldn't release her. So I thought, why don't we have a women's organization because at that time the Status of Women are starting to rise up. So that was really my way of getting into the leadership of CUPE—I was working on women's issues. We formed a women's committee that year when I was First Vice-President. The way we made it work was that we got in touch with all of the Locals and we put on these workshops to teach them parliamentary procedure. To begin with too, when I was married and at home with my children I became a Toast Mistress and that itself was my whole stepping stone because I became a parliamentarian and the whole thing opened up. I made it an issue that these women had to be taught. We would only let the women come to the workshops, no men were allowed at all. We held them in Vancouver for a long time and then we tried to disperse them a bit. But the first courses that we gave were in Vancouver. It was wonderful to get to know those women and get them working and then they really got involved in their Women's Committee. I stayed President for a number of years and then I stepped back and let the others take over. They were there great. Wonderful women came out of there. We had Joy Leach, mayor of Nanaimo. Some of the people got into government—Rosemary Brown—different people. It's amazing how things reached out from there. Gave them the real growth spirit that they wanted.

KN [00:25:32] They develop their skills through the program that you initiated?

MO [00:25:35] Yes, because we taught them about the Labour Code; we taught them how to run a meeting; we taught them what the issues were. We had wonderful instructors. We brought in from all over. It was a great thing. The men, at first, were kind of upset but they always supported us. I never really had any problems with the men not supporting what we were trying to do.

BG [00:26:07] Was pay equity a concern at that time?

MO [00:26:09] Oh absolutely, always. You'd think you get there and all of a sudden you'd slide two steps back. The same with the labour movement too. You'd move forward and two steps back.

KN [00:26:25] So you became President in 1976?

MO [00:26:33] I became President in '76, I guess it was.

KN [00:26:38] And can you talk about that, when you were the first woman President?

MO [00:26:42] I was the first woman President, but I was in Victoria and I was working at the school.

KN [00:26:47] So you weren't a full time President?

MO [00:26:51] I was full time President but not a paid full time President.

KN [00:26:56] Just got to work another job.

MO [00:26:59] I'll tell you the School District would be—don't know if I should say this—but a lot of CUPE business was handled out of the school office. But it was not that easy. It was it was good to some point until we set up our own office and then we had Bernice as a full time Secretary Treasurer. Well then it was hard for me to keep on top of everything because they had their own little corner going there. It was always a little difficult for me to really know what was going on.

KN [00:27:34] This was Bernice Kirk the Secretary Treasurer.

MO [00:27:38] She was very good.

KN [00:27:42] She was full time and you weren't?

MO [00:27:44] Yeah, she was full time in the office. Whereas I was sitting in a School District office. The whole things was different. But when you become President you also become Vice-President at the national level. So I also was having to represent the National Executive as well.

KN [00:28:07] So you were off to Ottawa to meetings?

MO [00:28:09] Oh yes, at least once a month. But then too, they would give me orders to pass on to the Reps in Vancouver or different places. Well, then the Reps didn't like some of this stuff. But then I had to do what I was told. So it became a little difficult. We all got along fine. We really never had any real battles or anything like that, but I was very glad to say goodbye. I should have said goodbye a long time ago but I didn't.

KN [00:28:43] When you look back at your years as President of CUPE BC, are there any issues or events that stand out that you remember particularly that were significant for you?

MO [00:28:55] Well, I remember we went to the government many, many times. Some of it was successful, some of it wasn't. There is one time we ask for a cabinet meeting and they met us at Esquimalt Council Chambers. Grace McCarthy was there and she just was no help at all. She just absolutely ignored us and finally she just turned her chair around and gave us the back of her chair. I let myself be known at that time that was not a very good thing to do, but I really had to express my feelings toward her. The only time I saw her after that was at Jeffrey's graduation and they had a luncheon or dinner or something up in (unclear) Granville. I was there and she came in. She recognized me right away. I recognized her and we just glared at each other. We never forgot that. It was a very interesting time. I remember the Day of Protest. What year was that, the Day of Protest?

KN [00:30:22] That was '76 over Wage Controls — October '76.

MO [00:30:29] Well, I remember being at the office that morning. I had to go and open up school. I thought, I've got to be at the podium down there at 11:00. So I sat my desk and wrote a speech and I was down at the podium giving this speech at 11 o'clock and then went back after and finished my day at the school. It was crazy. What other things could I tell you about?

KN [00:30:59] You must have spent a lot of time between here and Vancouver?

MO [00:31:02] I did.

KN [00:31:02] And in the main office of CUPE?

MO [00:31:06] I did. I would do that on the weekends. I was married to the only man that would ever have put up with all that stuff. He was a gem. He just put up with it all. Sometimes he came with me; sometimes he didn't. One way I had when I was going to other divisional conventions and things I would try to take him; get a flight for him to come with me.

KN [00:31:28] So your children by this time are young adults I presume?

MO [00:31:34] I did give up a lot of my daughter's time. I felt sorry about that after; thinking that I should have been there more for her at the time. But you know, you do things which you do.

BG [00:31:54] Rich was telling us a story where you had to confiscate some car keys. Would you care to share that?

KN [00:32:00] That would have been when CUPE Staff went on strike.

MO [00:32:02] That would have been when CUPE National said you've got to do this. I could have been murdered.

BG [00:32:08] So that was a situation where you had direction.

MO [00:32:10] I had direction from the National Office, yes.

KN [00:32:12] But CUPE staff, which are national staff were on strike.

MO [00:32:16] Yes, they were on strike. Kealy Cummings was Secretary Treasurer and he phoned as he said you've got to get their car keys. Well that was not happy situation. In fact, I never did get their car keys. We just made a (unclear) of it. It never was done. The boys weren't very happy about that. You know, you were representing them too so you were caught in that kind of a situation.

BG [00:32:54] Were there any other women leading unions at the time when you were the President? Were there any other female Presidents of other unions around?

MO [00:33:00] After we started Grace Hartman was of course the president of National and she came out of Ontario. The Ontario division was also a woman. Her name was Bernice something or other. She was another very active person—very good at what she did.

KN [00:33:25] Did you get to know any other union leaders in British Columbia? Did you go to BC Fed meetings at all?

MO [00:33:33] I went to everything.

KN [00:33:34] When you went to a BC Fed meeting were there any other women there?

MO [00:33:40] Not that I remember but I'm sure there were because especially once we got women's organizations going they were representing their locals. So, eventually there would be quite a representation of women at those conferences.

KN [00:33:54] And at the BC Fed officers like the meetings.

MO [00:33:59] I never really met any of the women. What was his name? He said one day he said to me. We were out at night and I think it was the Municipal Conference where they have all the municipal leaders.

KN [00:34:17] Right. UBCM.

MO [00:34:18] They had this at Vancouver and some of us were invited to be there. Why can't I remember his name?

KN [00:34:29] Len Guy? Ray Haines?

MO [00:34:30] Before him. It'll come. Anyway. Big, tall guy.

KN [00:34:40] Jim Kinnaird?

MO [00:34:41] Anyway. He came over to me and he said—I had been dealing with some other people here and I made some kind of a joke or something—and he came over and he says, "You know, I really try to like you but I can't." I said, "I know I'm kind of a thorn in your side aren't I." But that I remember but now I see I don't even remember his name.

BG [00:35:12] That's the job of a good union president is to be a thorn in the side.

MO [00:35:22] We were always well respected at any of the conferences we went to and it certainly led me into many areas that I would never have been to. I think we did a good job when we were in the union. I think we really tried hard. I think I walked just about the whole of BC on the picket lines. But we were really caught in a time when everybody was trying to take away the rights of the union and I see they're starting to do that again.

KN [00:35:54] Oh, yeah.

MO [00:35:55] They're trying to take away everything that we really worked so hard to get in the first place. The governments were never very sympathetic. The old Social Credit, that was a group of people that you couldn't believe really. It was hard to deal with them.

KN [00:36:21] When you finished your term as President in 1980, did you remain active in CUPE? Did you still go to meetings and conventions and things like that?

MO [00:36:32] Well, I did. I went to one of the national conventions after the next term. I really enjoyed that but I was glad to say goodbye. You know, it was a very tough time and I've given up so much of my life and so much of my family life. You know my husband and I were dancers.

KN [00:36:56] Oh yeah?

MO [00:36:57] Ball room dancers. Twice a month we had these dancers. At least once there'd be a dance on the Saturday night that I had to be in Vancouver. So I'd fly over by

seaplane on Friday night and I have my meeting and then Saturday morning I'd have my meeting. I'd come home on Saturday night; go to the dance; get my car; be on the ferry in the morning and back at the meeting. I mean that's how silly it was.

KN [00:37:35] And so it must have been sometime after your term that CUPE presidents became full time?

MO [00:37:41] Yes.

KN [00:37:42] I don't know whether Owen was full time or not.

MO [00:37:44] No, he was not.

KN [00:37:46] Mike Dumler?

MO [00:37:47] Mike Dumler I think was the first full time president.

KN [00:37:51] You got to work with Bernice Kirk?

MO [00:37:55] Oh, yes. Bernice was very, very good at what she did. She was very steadfast. We could rely on Bernice all the way. She was good. As were most of the women too within the organization. If you asked somebody to do something they were right there for you. I really had no problem with the people that I was working with.

KN [00:38:18] It sounds like the women's committee that you initiated had a lot to do with women becoming active in the union and then eventually taking over leadership roles too.

MO [00:38:29] I'm sure that's the foundation of it all.

KN [00:38:31] Yeah.

MO [00:38:32] I'm very certain that that's foundation of it all. I think my beginning with the Toast Mistress had a lot to do with it. Because I had been trained in that area myself so it was easy then to pass it on to somebody else.

KN [00:38:54] So when you look at unions today, for example, we have the first woman president of the BC Federation of Labour in 2014. You know, that's 40 years after you were involved. But women seem to be much more active in leadership roles now. Do you have any comment about that in terms of ...

MO [00:39:22] I think its wonderful but I do believe that it also is because they are more involved in the workplace too. They're more involved in their own workplace before they ever get there. I think it's a wonderful thing because I think women have a lot to contribute. Although I'm not segregating between men and women, I'm not doing that because men are wonderful too, but I think that they realize that they can do a job that maybe they couldn't before. They have strengths that the men don't have and of course the men have strengths the women don't have. I think its wonderful.

KN [00:40:12] I've always thought that women were better at multitasking because they had to look after the family and in the kitchen and as well as a job and all the rest of it.

MO [00:40:25] Yes.

BG [00:40:29] So you became involved with the NDP. Was that in the '70s around the same time that you would have been President as well?

MO [00:40:37] Yes, my first run at NDP was in 1979. As they say, it was a real introduction to what it was all about. But you know there's no better training to become a parliamentarian or to be part of our government than unions because it's a very tough role.

KN [00:41:11] Mm hmm.

MO [00:41:11] As you know, it's not an easy role to play. You're looking at your back most of the time.

BG [00:41:23] Balancing interests. Trying to keep everyone happy.

MO [00:41:24] Right. It's a great training ground. Being in the trade union movement is a great training ground for anyone going into government.

KN [00:41:36] If you were to have a message that you would want to communicate to women in the trade union movement today about the struggles of the past for women and so forth, what would that message be? Is there anything you'd like to say to women today in the trade union movement about the past?

MO [00:41:59] Well, I'd say to a lot of people that are not even in the trade union movement because a lot of people they say - "oh union". I'd say you couldn't have today what you've got today without the work of the people that were in the trade union movement because they're the ones that gave you the privileges you have today. Whether you're in a union or not, you're really getting benefits of what the union has created. Don't you think so?

KN [00:42:26] Absolutely. Great statement.

BG [00:42:33] That's just about everything. I just wanted to ask, since leaving CUPE and everything, have you been part of any other sort of labour groups.

MO [00:42:47] No, not really. I really want to step away from everything. I was invited, especially when the government got in. I was invited to be part of some of their labour sections but I just wanted to get right away from everything. I was really worn out and I was tired of it all and I wanted another kind of life altogether. So I refused those offers but I have continued to do it in my own little way; in my circles that I belong to and things like that.

KN [00:43:28] Carry on the torch.

BG [00:43:29] My last question is, why do you think that it's important that folks today remember parts of our labour history, for example, through hearing stories like this? Do you think it's a value to keep the labour history alive?

MO [00:43:47] I absolutely do because, you know, it was the labour movement too, that even brought up all the status of women. I mean, they wouldn't have the Status of Women without the labour movement. When I had the women's organization in Vancouver and the province of B.C., we then talked Grace Hartman into organizing one at the national level.

At the national level I was also involved there and we became then involved with the Status of Women. That opened up so many doors for so many people. I think that women today or anybody today, women or not, the history of the growth of the labour movement in B.C. or across Canada is very interesting and they should remember that somebody had to get there for them.

KN [00:44:44] Good. Well, thank you very much. That's great. Okay.

BG [00:44:48] Wonderful. I'm just going to put on the record today is January 18th, 2017, and the interviewers were Ken Novakowski and Bailey Garden with the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre. Okay. So just tell us a little bit about that. You were negotiating for pensions?

KN [00:45:01] Yeah. Who's the national president when you were President of the BC division.

MO [00:45:08] Grace Hartman.

KN [00:45:09] Was she president then?

MO [00:45:10] King was at first and then Grace took over from King.

BG [00:45:16] So this was when you were president that the pension issue came up.

MO [00:45:20] Yes, we were we were notified by Alec (unclear) who was a representative here in Victoria and he was a great representative. We had some great representatives in Victoria. He got in touch with me and he said, "You know, Muriel, they're negotiating a pension plan for the nurses and the fire people. Would you like me to get in touch with them and see if you could be involved"? I said, by all means, let's do it. We met with them in Vancouver and they agreed then that we could negotiate with them. That's how this pension came. That's how we got.

KN [00:46:00] The municipal pension?

MO [00:46:03] The Municipal Pension Plan That's how it became part of our Plan.

KN [00:46:06] Oh, that's very significant.

MO [00:46:07] And Alec followed it all the way through. He was a very clever man and he just kept us on the road all the way. It was really good. I'm so proud of that pension plan.

KN [00:46:18] That's great.

MO [00:46:21] And you know, it it really works too for everybody because it raises as years go by.

KN [00:46:34] Indexed.

MO [00:46:35] Indexed

BG [00:46:36] So people are still benefiting today then from it.

MO [00:46:39] Oh yes, I've had people come up and thank me for the Pension Plan.