

Interview: Denise Kellahan (DK)

Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG)

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Transcription: Janet Hall

SG [00:00:06] Let's start, Denise, with your full name and your date of birth and where you were born, just the basic facts.

DK [00:00:12] My name is Denise Kellahan and I was born here in Vancouver in 1949.

SG [00:00:21] The exact date?

DK [00:00:22] March 24th, 1949.

SG [00:00:25] Do you have any siblings?

DK [00:00:26] Yes, I do. I have a brother who is very close in age to me and been my best friend throughout my entire life.

SG [00:00:36] When we spoke earlier, you'd mentioned to me that your father had a very typical occupational related and health related issue before you were born. This is a part of history that we don't know very much about—that is tuberculosis in B.C. Tell me about that.

DK [00:00:58] My dad worked for the B.C. Electric driving the streetcars—this was in 1939. My parents were married here in Vancouver in 1939 and four months after they were married my dad was diagnosed with tuberculosis. What I was always told is that they had a very strong belief that he was infected through being so publicly exposed on his job. That started nearly a ten year journey for my parents, where my dad was in the sanitarium up in Tranquille near Kamloops and had a series of very difficult surgeries. In those days they would collapse the lung by putting 40 pound weights on the chest and my dad had to lay immobile with this weight on his chest. I guess that was their way of trying to kill the tuberculosis in the lung. He was in and out of hospital. My mom used to have to take the train up to Tranquille to visit him. I visited Tranquille myself just within the last few years for the first time in my life and I was just overcome with such a sense of loneliness. It's a condemned building now and thinking of my mom as a young bride having to take a very long train trip up there. I wished I'd asked her, "Where did you stay? Did some family take you in?" So, it was a very difficult time for them. But, in 1948 a medicine called Streptomycin was developed which helped my dad. They made a very big decision to start a family, which my mom said was not an easy decision. But, because my mom also had a career and had to work all through those years, she felt that she could always support her family if she needed to. She used to tell me it was the best decision we ever made.

SG [00:02:57] Oh, of course. So where did she work?

DK [00:02:59] My mom worked for a company called Galbraith and Sully which sold big farm equipment. She was like an administrative assistant—in those days called a secretary. She quit work when she was seven months pregnant with me because, in those days, it was expected women did not continue in their jobs. She told me that her job—her one job—was replaced by three men with the salaries to go with it. Both my mom and dad

had very, very strong work ethics. My dad, although he was ill all my growing up years—he never really regained full health—ran his own businesses. He had a number of businesses. He owned a Telaparts Wholesale here in Vancouver and strung most of the antennas for televisions all around the Lower Mainland and the interior and sold parts for televisions. Then he got really ill—because he developed all kinds of complications from the tuberculosis—he died when I was 22.

SG [00:04:08] So you yourself started working quite young?

DK [00:04:12] I did. I used to do lots of work for my dad. He ran the business out of the house. He used to have me selling roofing jobs and chimney sweeping jobs. He used to even send me out bill collecting. I think back on that, I was like 17, 18 years old and had no problem knocking on doors collecting for my dad from people who hadn't paid their bills. I think about that now and I don't think I'd be I don't think I'd be sending my 17 or 18 year old knocking on doors to bill collect. Many of them were from very wealthy homes up in the British Properties who could well afford to pay their bills.

SG [00:04:52] And had to have their doors knocked on.

DK [00:04:54] That's right.

SG [00:04:57] You also got married quite young.

DK [00:04:58] I did. I married very young and had my family very young. That marriage unfortunately didn't last, although we've become lifelong friends as parents of our two children and four grandchildren. I went to work when they were just very small. I had worked there before as a young person at the Tomahawk Barbecue in North Van. It is probably one of the most famous restaurants, the oldest restaurant in North Vancouver.

SG [00:05:28] It's quite an iconic place with totem poles and everything. When you first see the name you wonder, my gosh is it politically incorrect but actually it's not. It's quite an amazing place.

DK [00:05:38] It was owned by Chick Chamberlain and he had a great friendship with a lot of the First Nations people. They brought many, many historical gifts to him which were artefacts displayed in the restaurant. Some of them now, I think, have been donated to museums and whatnot. It's still in operation today.

SG [00:05:59] So what was it like to work there?

DK [00:06:02] I think just about everybody I know that I grew up with worked at one time at the Tomahawk Barbecue. It was a very social place to work. It's where I met the father of my children, actually. We actually had our little wedding reception in the Tomahawk Barbecue after we got married. We had a very small wedding and went back there and Mrs. Chamberlain had decorated the restaurant for us. It was a place that you could go and work for a while and then, if you went on to other things, there always seemed to be a job available whenever you walked through the door. Interesting.

SG [00:06:38] Really something from another time.

DK [00:06:40] Absolutely.

SG [00:06:43] You also got started at that point into the restaurant industry.

DK [00:06:46] Yes and I liked it. I was always somebody who was very social and I just enjoyed my job as a server.

SG [00:06:57] At what point did you actually get into White Spot?

DK [00:07:01] I left the Tomahawk barbecue and I applied for a job at White Spot in I think 1976. I was hired right on the spot and I began shift work. I had to work night shifts. In those days, you were scheduled all over the map—nights, days, weekends. That sort of swing work was incredibly difficult to be organizing childcare. I look back on those years and I had two babies. They were just two and three years old and to try to organize daycare was almost impossible. My mom helped out so much because when I was working night shift I had to leave my children with her because my marriage had ended by that point. I was a single mom. I remember going in to the office where I had to give my notice. My children's father had been in a terrible car accident and was hospitalized for many months and I just couldn't manage the shift work anymore. I went into the office and told the manager that I had to give my notice. I didn't have another job to go to but I had to find something where I could get my children into a proper day-care. He went, "Whoa, whoa, wait a minute here, wait a minute here, surely we can work something out." It was almost like serendipity. One of the other servers walked in during this meeting and handed in her notice. She was a day shift worker and I was able to pick up her 20 hours on day shift. Then I spent the next, probably year, just asking people if they wanted a day off or did they want to go home early so that I could build a work week that I could support my family. Eventually I worked my way up to having a 40 hour workweek and eventually Monday to Friday day shift which was pretty special in those days. That wasn't the case for many, many workers in that industry.

SG [00:09:06] I'm sure it was still nonetheless a long process to get there.

DK [00:09:09] Absolutely. I relied on being able to build my workweek with people that wanted time off and that I could take their hours. People were always too happy to say, "Oh, sure, I'd like this day off" or "I'd like to go home early a couple of hours." I built up from a 20 hour workweek.

SG [00:09:29] So the time you went to work that was after Nat Bailey, the original owner, had sold to General Foods.

DK [00:09:36] That's right. I believe General Foods was the owner at the time I started.

SG [00:09:39] Had people noticed any difference in the style of management or anything?

DK [00:09:45] None that I was aware of because when I started General Foods owned it and nothing that I would be aware of.

SG [00:09:56] They also owned KFC at that time (Kentucky Fried Chicken).

DK [00:09:58] That's right.

SG [00:10:02] What was your involvement in the workplace and in the union organization in this period?

DK [00:10:09] Very little. I was aware that we were unionized. If there were meetings to vote on a contract, I went to them. I was not involved in the union at all and became involved when we became aware that there was upheaval in the Union. I guess the best way to describe it is, there was a clash between elected union officials and staff. There was also a clash between what became to be known as a business unionism style versus some of the more progressive people coming in. There was quite a lot of upheaval. I talked to my dear friend and sister Leila Harding, that's probably the first person that I kind of really got involved with. I had stepped back. I wanted nothing further to do with the union. I was tired of all the infighting and just went about my business, did my job. Leila came and paid me a visit. She was the National President of FASWOC (Food and Service Workers of Canada) at that time. She had kind of taken a very firm stand against a number of these hired people that were kind of running the Union, as opposed to the elected officials. At that time, there needed to be a number of local positions filled. My recollection is that I first started off being acclaimed as Vice President of the Local, but I very soon became the President of the Local. We're going back 40 years, I just don't remember how that transition happened.

SG [00:12:04] Just to back up for a minute. The White Spot had a number of different— had a company union.

DK [00:12:09] That's right.

SG [00:12:10] The one you're talking about is the Food And Service Workers of Canada— FASWOC.

DK [00:12:13] That's correct.

SG [00:12:15] So you became Vice President. This was at the time of some upheaval.

DK [00:12:21] Yes.

SG [00:12:23] What was the outcome of that clash?

DK [00:12:27] The elected officials took control of the Union and at that time CAIMAW loaned to us various representatives. I went to a meeting and Jess Succamore was there. Jess Succamore subsequently became my mentor, my very, very dear friend who I miss immensely. He passed away last year. I really liked what he had to say. It became clear that there were discussions going on about a potential merger between FASWOC and CAIMAW and those of us that were acclaimed to the positions in the local really knew nothing. We didn't even know how to run a grievance meeting and they loaned to us some of their Staff Reps. Jef Keighley, for instance, was assigned to come and help us out and Pete Smith. I subsequently met John Bowman and Cathy Walker and all these people who were so knowledgeable and gave so generously of their time teaching us basically how to grow our union and how to take control of servicing our membership properly. I remember very clearly Jef coming to a lot of grievance meetings with us. Once we were in position in the Local, we spent a great deal of time being on site with the membership going to the various units—we had White Spots, we had 50 KFC's. I believe at the time there were 19 unionized White Spots He was basically teaching us. Then they made it possible for our shop stewards to go to shop steward schools, health and safety schools. We were basically in this time frame where we were just learning, learning, learning. It was an amazing experience. I look back on it now because when I got into it I knew absolutely

nothing. Then merger talks took place and we made the decision to take a vote of our membership province-wide.

SG [00:14:51] Could I just back up for a minute. What was FASWOC's affiliation? Were they part of the Confederation of Canadian Unions like CAIMAW?

DK [00:14:59] I believe they were. I'm not certain of that but I'm pretty sure they were at that point. Because Jess had had a long affiliation with FASWOC. For years he tried to mentor them and help them. Not with any thought of ever them becoming part of CAIMAW. That sort of came much later. He was just somebody who helped other unions get established. So, yes, I believe they were.

SG [00:15:26] Okay, but at this point he started looking towards the possibility of merger with CAIMAW.

DK [00:15:34] Of course, that was not well-received at all by the Company. Here they had gone from a company union and then started realizing when it became FASWOC that things were really starting to change. Then when the talk of merging with CAIMAW came up, oh my goodness. I well remember that was not well-received at all. But, all of us banded together. We went around and took a province wide vote which was no small undertaking. I had to do, in subsequent years, many province wide votes for a whole lot of things. That is a huge undertaking even to organize it. You're doing two meetings a day because of shift workers to allow day and night to come. The vote was taken in the affirmative to move forward with a merger with CAIMAW.

SG [00:16:28] You mentioned earlier there were some 22 meetings. Were these individual restaurants or restaurant groups?

DK [00:16:36] Groups and 22 locations. We could be, for instance, in Nanaimo and we had White Spot and KFC people coming to the meetings. We had to have meetings all over, up and down Vancouver Island, Prince George, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, all through the Okanagan, Lower Mainland. We had to do several locations to make it suitable for people to take transit to. It would take probably two to three weeks to complete all of this. We had teams of people going. But when it was a merger, I would have been probably, as President of the Local, at every meeting and Jess Succamore I well remember being there. This we did with the merger with CAIMAW. At the time, I was off full time with the Secretary Treasurer servicing the members and we moved down then to the CAIMAW offices at 707 12th Street. We had really close contact then with all the very experienced Reps at CAIMAW. When you think of it, this was a really big thing for CAIMAW, too. This was an industrial union and known as a very militant union. For them to take on all these service sector workers, this was a whole new ballgame for them as well. Yet we were just welcomed with open arms and people bent over backwards to assist in every way they could. John Bowman, I remember him kind of taking me under his wing and explaining so much history to me and strategizing on how to take on issues. I consider myself very privileged to have worked with all of those people.

SG [00:18:37] That must have been an incredible experience—because you mentioned that there had been opposition or at least uncertainty about the merger with CAIMAW—to go through this democratic process.

DK [00:18:48] Absolutely.

SG [00:18:49] It obviously succeed in winning them over. How did that play out? How did you get that sense of change taking place there?

DK [00:19:01] I just remember going to information meetings and sitting and having lots of Q&A with people like Jess Succamore. It became very clear to me that this was going to put our membership in a far stronger position to take on some of the issues that were incredibly important to this industry and that we would have the backing and the expertise to do that. It wasn't very long after that merger that we were in negotiations with White Spot and Roger Crowther headed up that set of bargaining. I was on the bargaining committee and that was a very, very difficult set of bargaining which ended up in a ten and a half weeks strike. The Company was very resistant, shall we say, to us being part of CAIMAW. You know, those weren't easy times.

SG [00:20:01] So that was evident from the get go.

DK [00:20:03] Oh, yes.

SG [00:20:05] You've gone from being a server in a restaurant with trying to manage your family, suddenly thrust into managing a tremendously active group of workers. That must have been quite an experience for yourself. Do you remember what you felt like at that time?

DK [00:20:25] Yes. I remember feeling a huge sense of responsibility and I remember feeling like I just have to give 200% to these people to be entrusted with such a position. I remember that. I worked incredibly long hours. It was very hard on my family because I took phone calls well into the evening. My kids actually do quite a funny little thing about me in those years. It's mum on the phone and banging my hand on the kitchen table and going, you know, eat up, eat up. So I'm managing kids; I'm listening to a grievance; and I made myself available to people 24/7. I didn't do this alone, by the way. I had an incredible team of people that were part of the Executive and we were all committed. I don't take credit for all of this. We became a very hands on Executive. I remember Frank Sobczak, for instance. He became the long time Vice- President of the Local, and subsequently when I went on staff with CAW, he became the President. We would go and do Staff Room visits in all these restaurants and KFC's. For instance, if we had bulletins to put out, we didn't mail them. We took them around in person and posted them on bulletin boards which gave us access to talk to people. So all these issues and problems just came out of the woodwork. We didn't have to grievance shop. They were just boom, boom on our desk. We made it an absolute commitment to return all calls in a day. So, when calls came in, if you called, we got back to you before the end of the day. You didn't wait days to talk to a Union Rep. A lot of the issues were really centered around scheduling. Scheduling was probably the biggest issue. Of course, there were disciplinary hearings and all those sorts of things that went on, but we were very hands on. All I remember is being, well it was exhilarating but exhausting at the same time because I just absolutely felt very strongly that servicing was the number one prerequisite for this group. We slowly built a wonderful Union. We went into units where we didn't have, for instance, shop stewards and health and safety reps, and people that would talk to us and be interested. I would just ask them, "Have you ever given any thought to becoming a shop steward?" The pat answer always was, "Well, I don't really know anything." I used to say, "you only need to have integrity and common sense and we'll provide the training." So we encouraged people to come and get trained and represent their members. It took time but we built an incredibly vibrant Local in those days. People were then empowered to take on issues and there were always people that their interest may be lay more around health and safety than it would

about being a shop steward. So, we managed to get a very good group of activists just by encouraging them.

SG [00:24:02] My guess is that White Spot had not previously gone on strike before the 1988 strike?

DK [00:24:08] Not to my knowledge. Never during my time.

SG [00:24:12] Obviously, that commitment to the union and whatnot would have been a major factor in getting there, so often is. What was it like in the lead up to that strike? What were the conditions that eventually led to it?

DK [00:24:24] There were three major issues that were the key issues of the '88 bargaining. That was the right of workers to maximize their hours up and to including a 40 hour work week. Let me just take a minute to explain why that was so important. Before that, management could basically schedule shifts of varying lengths. So they might have 8 hours of coverage, but they would schedule it with two, four-hour shifts. There were people that wanted to work 40 hours a week, and there were a lot of reasons why, aside from the income. But, there was a threshold, I believe, of 20 hours to be able to be eligible for benefits. So, the ability to have an eight hour day, if it could be worked out, was incredibly important. The ability to have some shifts selection by seniority was incredibly important. The other issue was management doing bargaining unit work; to make sure that the work in the restaurant was being done by unionized staff. The third issue was protection against contracting out. It was, I think, just before that time that the Commissary closed and the work was subsequently contracted out. That became a big red flag about contracting out. We were in bargaining and in mediation at the Labour Board and it got down to the wire and it was really a very, very serious strike. There were 19 units; 19 White Spot picket lines to man. Things happened in the middle of that strike that were just so shocking and scary. I'll never forget the day I got the phone call that they were taking down the chicken sign at the Georgia and Cardero White Spot and nailing up the windows. It's hard for me to describe the feelings I had inside as to what this meant to our members.

SG [00:26:41] The suggestion was that we're going to close the place.

DK [00:26:42] Absolutely. There were some very important wins. There was an unfair labour practice at the time because the Company had published full page ads saying CAIMAW was a closer of businesses. It was our wonderful colleague and lawyer, Joan Gordon, who won that case for us at the Board. It was an amazing outcome. White Spot had to publish, in 23 different newspapers where they had taken out these ads, an apology and retraction, which was almost unheard of at the time. When we got to finally be able to conclude an agreement after ten and a half weeks strike, we bargained open Georgia and Cardero White Spot. The chicken sign went back up and the boards came off the window and that remained operational until just about a year or two ago it closed. Obviously, it's sitting on a very valuable piece of property and we always knew that at some point that could be redeveloped but it stayed open all these years.

SG [00:27:54] Can you tell me a be a bit more about what actually happened when they took down the chicken sign?

DK [00:27:57] I got a phone call from the shop steward saying they're taking down the chicken sign; they're boarding up the windows; she was obviously very upset; they're closing it. Roger and I tore down there. We just said we're going to do everything we can

to make sure this is reopened and we did. The strike wasn't settled without an agreement to that. We were able to negotiate that if a White Spot closed, people had bumping rights into other unionized White Spots and there had to be a notice period and all the rest of it. So this led to some very important protections for the workers after that strike. We were successful in achieving language in all the key areas that were the result of the strike.

SG [00:28:54] That must've been quite a victory to actually get that in the collective agreement that that place was going back open.

DK [00:29:00] Absolutely. I believe it was a Letter of Understanding that was an addendum to the agreement, if I recollect. You have no idea what that felt like. It was such a huge relief.

SG [00:29:12] I presume this was all under White Spot owner Peter Toigo. He was the owner at that time of White Spot?

DK [00:29:17] That's correct.

SG [00:29:20] Some of the things that people don't know about. It was also just before the strike that you took on an additional responsibility as a CAIMAW Staff Rep.

DK [00:29:32] That's right.

SG [00:29:35] Tell me how that happened.

DK [00:29:35] I was off on lost time and I believe that Roger Crowther was assessing the work that I was doing and one other person and it was going to be that they only were taking on one person. I just remember Roger calling me into his office and saying that he would like to appoint me to staff. He and Jess would like to appoint me to staff and I believe that was in April of '88. I believe that the bargaining came to the position of striking in August of that year. So I was on staff for, I don't know, five or six months ahead of time. I was a very, very new Staff Rep. Sitting on that bargaining committee, I learned so much from Roger. I used to say that Roger Crowther was just like watching a conductor with an orchestra in how he conducted negotiations. He just had a style all his own and nobody could ever emulate it. I would never try to emulate it, but he was really something to watch.

SG [00:30:48] This from a guy who organized mining locals.

DK [00:30:50] Exactly. He really believed in us service sector workers. He's been a great mentor of mine; a great friend of mine. He was always so encouraging and he had a heart as big as all outdoors. He really cared about the workers; really cared about service sector workers.

SG [00:31:09] It's an interesting thing. You joined what was essentially an industrial local to start with service workers. You said it was controversial. After that baptism of fire in the White Spot strike, what was the integration of service workers with others in CAIMAW at that time?

DK [00:31:27] It was really quite something because there was another local CHAW Local 1 which represented hotel workers and Gary Stribney was the secretary treasurer or president of that local, I think President maybe. He and Frank Sobczak were working together on a number of organizing drives and they actually came up with the idea; why

aren't we just all one big local, because we all got along so great and our issues were very similar? We then conducted a merger vote again between those two locals. We became a relatively large service sector local. Sylvia Simpson, who negotiated many of the hotel agreements, was also another incredible ally for service sector workers. She understood the whole issue of maximization of hours and allowing people to be able to build a full work week so that they qualified for benefits. She also became a very integral part of our local as a Staff Rep. John Bowman had community based organizers all reporting to him. In that period we organized a number of hotels—primarily up in Whistler— other hotels around the Lower Mainland. That all became part of Local 3000. As well, we had credit unions, we had some office workers, the Arbutus Club, Hollyburn Country Club. We had a lot of various people in our local. We became a very large service sector local.

SG [00:33:25] A lot of those were fairly new certifications.

DK [00:33:27] A lot of them were, yes, because a lot of first collective bargaining went on and Sylvia Simpson did a lot of first contracts up in the Whistler area. She had a great rapport. Lamber Sidhu, who was our organizer, he just worked tirelessly bringing new members into the Union. It was a very exciting time in our Union at that time.

SG [00:33:50] So the local, for example, at the Hotel Vancouver and the Hotel Empress which are now in your successor UNIFOR, had they already been organized?

DK [00:34:02] They were already organized and they remained separate locals. After I went on staff with CAW, I serviced both those and bargained agreements many times over for Empress and Hotel Vancouver. They remained independent locals and they were organized quite some time before that and they would have come in through the CBRT&GW when they merged.

SG [00:34:29] The period 1988 to 1992, at that point CAIMAW begins holding merger talks with the Canadian Auto Workers.

DK [00:34:41] That's right.

SG [00:34:42] You became a Staff Rep at that point. Did you go through a similar process with that that you'd gone through with FASWOC—holding meetings?

DK [00:34:50] Absolutely, we did. I knew that the merger was coming and I knew that I was going to be laid off—being junior Staff Rep. But, I didn't say that to any of our members because I knew that the very best thing for our members was for this merger to go through. I didn't want any distraction that I wouldn't be there anymore because I knew that they'd be well looked after. The merger talks with CAW took quite some time. I think they started at least a couple of years before we finally moved to take a vote of the members.

SG [00:35:31] What was your sense of what prompted them?

DK [00:35:34] I think that there was a real sense countrywide of the whole mood of attacks against unions. I think that they knew, our National Executive Board in CAIMAW knew, that the best positioning for our members was to join with another Canadian union. It was at the time CAW broke away from the international union, I believe, in '85. They would never have joined an international union; it had to be a Canadian union. Our merger into CAW was really the start of many of the other unions that belong to the CCU subsequently

joining as well — merging into the CAW. My sense was that this was an important move for our members. We did the same democratic process. We set up meetings all over the province; did information meetings of why we believed, why we were recommending, people affirm that we go forth with this merger. It was successful. Then I assumed I would just be sailing off into some something else. I knew that I would want to try to continue this type of work but I wasn't really sure how. When the then President of the Local came to me—that was Maggie Morris—and she said to me that she did not want to run again. But, she said I'm only going to step down if you agree that you will run. I was like, "Oh". I said, "Are you sure, because I will never run against you" and she said, "No, no, no." So that's how that happened. I was nominated and acclaimed actually as president. Then shortly thereafter, I was elected to the National Executive Board of the CAW as one of two women. I was elected through the Western Regional Conference to be put on the National Executive Board of the CAW. Which was very interesting to me because coming out of CAIMAW, I was never thinking of any inequality between men and women. I mean, there were equal numbers of women reps between Winnipeg and Vancouver and with Jess Succamore and Roger Crowther, women were treated the very same as men in our in our union. So to go to the CAW and it was considered like a real breakthrough to have two women on the National Executive Board. I didn't understand the importance of that until I was on the National Executive Board. I served there for five years as well as president of my Local.

SG [00:38:29] So how did members feel about that change after voting for it?

DK [00:38:34] I think they very much trusted our recommendations. That was my sense—that if we said it was a good deal, that it was important for them, that they were going to be part of a larger union— which at that time I believe was the largest private sector union in the country. This was all very new for CAW to have service sector workers coming onboard. But of course ,there was also all the industrial end of our union and the mining community, transportation, all of that was all part of it as well. Our members basically, if we recommended that this was a good deal at that point, I think they had developed enough trust in our local union leadership that was good.

SG [00:39:20] Just before we talk a bit more about your work as a CAW rep, I just wanted to step back in a conversation that we had a couple of weeks ago where you said something I thought was very important. You said that a lot of people think of service work as a stopgap form of employment. Whereas in fact, thousands and millions probably service workers consider it full time employment and have been at it for many, many years.

DK [00:39:44] That's absolutely correct. It used to be something—it still rankles me when I hear people go, "Oh, well, you know, this is a stepping stone or this is stopgap work," like it's not important work. It's incredibly important work. I feel strongly that a lot of people don't understand—who haven't maybe worked in this industry—the level of organization it takes to be a good bartender, to be a good server, to be on no matter what's happening in your life and be pleasant to people and welcoming to people. To be in this industry, what it's like to be on your feet for eight hours a day and not every customer is maybe the most pleasant in the world, yet you have to learn how to handle all these situations. It's not necessarily stopgap. Yes, there are certain positions where people work their way through school or work for a period of time. But, the amount of people that I know in this industry who have stayed their entire careers in the hotels. Many people, their entire career is at White Spot. One of my closest friends, it's the only job she ever had in her whole life. She started there at 17 and she just retired about three years ago. She said, "Why would I go

look for another job? I was able to select my shifts, I had benefits, I love my clientele." It was an established fact that in the unionized environment, the turnover is far less than a non-union environment. People do tend to stay longer. The turnover is much lower because we're able to bargain pensions and RRSP and benefits. I think the most important issue for service sector workers that unionization affords is some control over your life through scheduling. I've had so much feedback over the years of people saying, "Do you know what that meant to my life; to be able to organize my work life around my husband's shifts or my childcare," or the ability to work less amount of time for a period in their life. They wanted to decline shifts by seniority as long as there was somebody else that was qualified who could fill the shift. So it gave them a control over their life. That's something that Sylvia Simpson and I really worked hand-in-hand in the contracts that we negotiated to establish that fact and to eliminate references to part-time. We used to call it limited availability as opposed to full-time, part-time, because often in certain environments part-time people had less rights than full-time people so we worked this out. Once we could really talk it through with companies, it's amazing the breakthroughs we made when we were able to allay the fears that you're not going to be left with nobody to fill the shift. There always has to be a qualified person to pick up the shift if the senior person wants to decline to a shorter shift or less days in a week. We also protected the people that took those shifts, that if a senior person did decline shifts, they couldn't just come along next week and say, "Oh, I've changed my mind, I want my job back, I want my hours back." They had to wait for them to become available again. So you had to make a conscious decision as a worker if this was the right thing for you, but I couldn't come along and just bump you out of hours that you picked up because I decided to decline them for a period of time. It worked really well. It was a really fair system. I think that was one of the most important breakthroughs we made in many contracts in hotels and in the restaurant. I could even think of doing that at Clipper Navigation over in Victoria where we had shift workers there. Many of them said to me, "Oh, what a difference that made." Most especially in the years where you were raising a young family and you maybe needed to have flexibility in your work week.

SG [00:44:01] From what I understand, CAW actually put quite a bit of money into organizing things like Starbucks and what not. Was that approach to service workers, were you able to make some gains in this period?

DK [00:44:13] We did make gains, but I think the biggest gains we made were in organizing hotels. Its very, very difficult to organize stand-alone restaurants, stand-alone coffee shops. One of the things that was so important when we first organized Starbucks, we organized four and put them into a master certification because we applied for certification for all four at the same time, so they were in one unit. That organizing went on, unfortunately, it's like déjà vu reading what's going on right now with the organization of Starbucks. They were a very, very anti-union company. I know there's all kinds of unfair labour practices going on in the States right now. At one point we had nine but they were very difficult to hang on to because of the turnover. Our activists, our unionized activists, left and went on to other things. It's after I was off servicing in other areas, I wasn't servicing in that area anymore I was on staff, but I talked to John Bowman about it recently. He said it just became a point where we knew we couldn't hang on to them and we don't have any Starbucks anymore. To organize a stand-alone restaurant is not easy. We had a master certification with White Spot where all 19 were in one certification covered by a one collective agreement. That is incredibly strong bargaining power to have that many. Subsequently, White Spot started franchising out certain White Spots. A very important piece of our history is, there was an application by one of the franchisees in Langley wanting to separate out from the master cert to be able to bargain separately. We

took that on and that went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, where we were able to prove that all the franchised restaurants were under the common control and direction of the Company and they were prohibited from carving themselves out. Now, we did have one restaurant we organized out in Maple Ridge, which was franchised, which was not part of the original master cert. We organized it afterwards and we had to bargain separately for that, but we were able to achieve what was in the master contract. That was not without a labour dispute as well.

SG [00:46:59] So at this point, if any new White Spot is built somewhere, they'll likely try to do the same thing with franchising.

DK [00:47:06] Well, whether they do or not, if it's a corporate White Spot you have to now organize address by address. How all these KFCs and White Spots got organized in the first place was through voluntary recognition and that was under Nat Bailey and General Foods. When the Company started to see the changes coming about with the union, they then took a very strong stand that no longer were they going to voluntarily recognize any new units. The union had to go organize them address by address. That was a seismic change.

SG [00:47:42] Yeah, I'm sure because that is very difficult organizing.

DK [00:47:45] Yes.

SG [00:47:50] The CAW has always been focused in the auto industry and whatnot. CAW didn't have any particular emphasis, from what I understand, in environmental issues at this point. Yet you stepped out in front, as I understand it, in this period to work with the Labour Environmental Alliance as a staff rep representing the CAW.

DK [00:48:15] Actually I was on the National Executive Board at the time I became involved with the Labour Environmental Alliance. I remember a CAW Convention in Vancouver where we had a side meeting. I remember Sam Gindin, who was our chief economist and wonderful trade unionist in the CAW, helped facilitate this meeting. It was at a time when there was a lot of strife against the logging industry and environmentalists. He put together—or helped we all kind of contributed—a protocol for trying to bring labour and environmentalists together. I think he saw ahead, "This is going to be so important; it's about green jobs; it's about not pitting people against each other; it's how do we work together." There were a lot of people at that meeting. I remember it was held in the big meeting room at the CAW hall. I can picture we were all sitting around horseshoe-style and it was it was quite hopeful. I guess at the time—I was talking to Roger Crowther about this—I think he came and asked me would I get involved. I saw my role very much—I admired Mae Burrows tremendously, and I saw that I might be able to play a role in helping with some funding for the Labour Environmental Alliance to thrive. I just felt that there was such an opportunity for the CAW to really embrace environmental issues. I'd hope they would become a leader in this. Now at the time, this was difficult because obviously this is before the time of electric cars and all the rest of it and so there was always the balancing act of where were the membership at.

SG [00:50:29] This was later 2000's? Is it roughly?

DK [00:50:33] No, I think it was the late nineties because I went on staff in '99 and I think it was the late nineties. I remember being on the National Executive Board and I remember CAW being very supportive. I remember calling the secretary treasurer and he put up quite

a lot of seed money at different times. I also remember calling Kenny Lewenza when he became president and I would have been a staff rep then. They helped out, but they also were, "This can't become like a regular funding thing every year." I would go to the locals and try to encourage and lobby for donations to keep it afloat because I just felt the work was so important. Yourself, Sean, the work that you did with Mae. I remember the Cancer Smart book, how important that was to workers and to people and to families. I always hoped that our union would—we used to have environmental committees and things like that that met the side meetings at conventions—but I always wished at the time that it could have been really mainstream. I could see somebody like Mae Burrows doing a complete presentation to an entire convention, not being relegated to a smaller gathering of people that were environmentalists.

SG [00:52:15] Do you think it did bring some environmental consciousness to the membership?

DK [00:52:17] I do. I'm not going to take credit for that but I think the work that you and Mae did certainly brought consciousness. It certainly brought consciousness to our workers. I go back to the days where maybe you had health and safety committees that met because they were required to have meetings. We really got some teeth in things when we were able to start putting on workshops where people really learned about harmful chemicals and what it could do to them and lobbying for proper protections and understanding what MSDS sheets were. Before that, I don't think that there was that type of consciousness. I think it made a huge difference to our members. We also represented cleaning staff that cleaned buildings that were working with these chemicals all the time. They were in Local 3000. Servantage—they've changed their names several times—they were often people where English was a second language and did they understand the harmful effects of perhaps not wearing goggles or masks or all those things? Cathy Walker did a tremendous amount of work in our union around health and safety. I can think of many workshops that Mae Burrows led. Yes, did it make a difference? Did it bring a consciousness? Whether it's brought the type of consciousness, I think that's probably grown over the years nationally. Now remember I've been retired since 2009. So, what's gone on in UNIFOR, I don't know firsthand anymore. I'm not there anymore. Certainly it made qualitative changes to the members I represented.

SG [00:54:17] When we talked earlier on the phone, I'd asked you where your union consciousness had come from because you said that at home nobody talked about politics. You said a highlight was your first convention of the Confederation of Canadian Unions.

DK [00:54:32] Yes.

SG [00:54:33] Where a light went on, it was inspiring.

DK [00:54:34] It was very inspiring. I grew up in a home where I remember clearly asking my parents who they voted for and I was promptly told that was a very rude question and I wasn't allowed to ask questions like that. I went, "But I'm really interested in why you do vote, who you do vote for and why". Oh, that was taboo. I grew up in a home where and had come from a family of people and my grandparents that had really good values. My mother did volunteer work up until a week before she died at the age of 89. They were very giving in the community but I had no consciousness of unions, I mean, none. So when I got involved and I went to my first CCU convention, I just remember sitting there and so many different issues were talked about and guest speakers on global issues, local

issues. I remember just soaking it up like a sponge and feeling that I'd somehow come home. There were so many things to get involved in that if you could just make a little difference. You're not going to change the world, but one little step that might make something a little better for somebody. I just couldn't get enough of it. I went to so many educationals and if they had shop steward schools, arbitration courses, whatever was going, I wanted to learn. I call it like a blind going up because I'd never been exposed to anything like that before, and meeting people like—

SG [00:56:27] Remember where that convention was?

DK [00:56:29] Here in Vancouver.

SG [00:56:30] It was here in Vancouver?

DK [00:56:31] I remember meeting John Lang and Laurel Ritchie and some of the people from Winnipeg, Pat McEvoy. I was just so inspired by so many of them. It just was like, "What an incredible group." To this day, I just feel enormous privilege that I got to work amongst these people and learn from all of them. Every one of them was so generous with their time in teaching us and talking things through with us—every one of them.

SG [00:57:07] So you retired in 2009, having basically devoted your life to working with service workers and making their lot better. It's been tough to organize in that sector. I don't think anybody would disagree, but the gains have certainly been made. What do you think are the most significant ones that you can put your finger on?

DK [00:57:29] The most significant gains in the service sector? I would say it would be the hotels. I think hotels have a great deal of stability. They're not a manufacturing job that can be shifted to another country. There is a great deal of longevity of people hanging on to their jobs in hotels. I think our gains in hotels was probably the most significant. After I went on staff I serviced in many other industries, in transportation primarily. As well, I had the Empress and the Hotel Vancouver. I also watched the organizing of various plants and whatnot. But in the service sector, I wish there was more of a dedication these days. I see other unions really taking on the organizing of service sector workers and I wish I saw that same level right now within our union. I don't know that they're not perhaps trying. I don't know any of that because I don't work there anymore. I just feel that there is such a need, if you want to make a real difference in where so many jobs lie, to organize these workers. It would take a very concentrated, and I understand it also takes a great financial commitment on the union's part. It's a great financial commitment because these things don't happen overnight. But, we certainly had a very dedicated group of organizers in my day with John Bowman and Lamber Sidhu and Gary Stribney and Frank Sobczak who were out there really doing very strategic and concentrated organizing work which really built our local. What they're doing now, as I say, I'm not there.

SG [00:59:33] Well, I think part of it is also getting back to some of the rank and file democracy and engagement. Too many people, I think, have seen unions go from being member engaged groups to largely the business being done by a business agent. I think that was a big part of your involvement in the labour movement was to bring about some of that engagement.

DK [01:00:00] Yeah, I really did believe it. It's very interesting, there was a PhD student who did a book many years ago and he phoned and asked if he could follow me around for quite a period of time. I said absolutely. He came to meetings and was a wonderful young

person. But what he saw, which was very interesting to me, was because you had a problem we'd be there to fix it. If a steward called and said, X, Y, and Z, I need help with this, I was always one to kind of jump in and try to fix the problem. Whereas his analysis, which was a real learning experience for me, might have been to have said, "Listen, why don't you try to do whatever the particular issue was and then if you need help." But I was so intent on making sure everybody's problems were fixed yesterday. That wasn't necessarily the best thing to empower people, because how you empower people is by having people do for themselves and having the confidence to do for themselves. I was really glad that I took his comments which were very gently given and very nicely given, but it was very true because when I really had a good deep dive at how I did things, I was so busy. "You made a phone call? Oh, yes, I can call and I could do this and that. But, it wasn't necessarily empowering people. I don't want to be too hard on myself because I know I empowered a lot of people by encouraging them to get involved, but it was an interesting observation of his.