Interview: Jackie Campbell (JC), Zoe McCrystal (ZM)
Interviewer: Patricia Wejr (PW), Natasha Fairweather (NF)
Date: June 14, 2024
Location: Burnaby, BC
Transcription: Patricia Wejr

PW [00:00:05] I'll just start off by introducing the day, which is June 13th, 2024, and we are doing this interview as part of the BC Labour Heritage Center Oral History Program, and also for a podcast. With us today are, Jackie Campbell and Zoe McCrystal. I'm Patricia Wejr, a volunteer and also Natasha Fairweather, who is project manager at the BC Labour Heritage Center. Jackie, can we start off by could you just tell me, where you were born and maybe a little bit about your family and anything you want to recall from your early years before we move on to work in the shorework industry.

JC [00:0:54] Early, like when I was a little kid or how early do you want me to go?

PW [00:00:54] First of all, where you were born. I'm curious about...

JC [00:01:02] Vancouver.

PW [00:01:05] So you lived by the water, but not right on the water then.

JC [00:01:08] Right. So I lived in Vancouver. We moved around quite a bit, so to the North Shore and Burnaby. But I was born at Vancouver General. So born and bred Vancouverite.

PW [00:01:22] And what about your family? What did your family do?

JC [00:01:26] My mum was born in Vancouver too, she kind of just did contract work, survey work and that sort of thing for different companies, you know, and being a mum. And my stepdad was a logger, he owned partnership in a logging company up the coast.

PW [00:01:47] We always ask these questions because we're interested about, like, was there anything in your childhood that led you, to later on become an activist in the union?

JC [00:01:59] I don't think so. Like, neither of them were union people. Like my mum was contract work and my stepdad was an independent partnership, gypo logging type thing up [unclear]. But I didn't go up there. We went once to see him, so I don't think that really influenced my—it was more when I moved away from home, a bunch of us, because it was '69. And so we did that kind of thing, we all banded together. Two of the people we went with were partnering on a real old double-ender, gillnetter, and somebody knew somebody that was from Sointula and so we had a place we could stay. So about four of us went up and they went fishing and we just kind of eked out. Well, you know, self-sufficiency, when we first got there, and that was way back in '69. So that was my first introduction to the fishing families and fishing industry. Do you want me to say about the evolution of how I got to the ...

PW [00:03:13] Did you stay on Sointula for long?

JC [00:03:17] Well, I was there for a couple of years. So that was '69, '70. So I was like 17, 18 because I'm 72 now. And, you know, so we were just fooling around and, you know, I

was still a teenager. And then I left and then I got married, had a son, and then we moved back. My husband got a job in one of the logging camps, I think it was an Nimpkish camp, as an accountant, right? And we found a place in Sointula and so I was there with my son and he would come on the weekends. So he was born in '72. So that was probably '73, around '73. I started living in Sointula again, you know, as a family. And so it was kind of my dream being surrounded by people, making lots of money, seining and mostly seining and gillnetting. There was some trollers and stuff. You know, to get a job on a highliner, right, and actually make some money. And because we ended up splitting up so I was a single mum most of the time. So I was just did whatever: painting boats, net mending. We went and took a course. In those days they had those—now what they called? Job creation programs. So we made signs for road signs with driftwood and dug the mud out of the hall to make a basement sort of thing in the main hall. And I learned how to navigate with this course and then I learned net mending and navigation and, basically the skills to be a fisherman. We worked on the water so we learned quite a bit. But that was all part of sort of the program. And so I was like sort of a jack of all trades and master of none. And so I just did whatever we could to sort of get by. And it was easier on the island. It's kind of, back then. Now it's more like a Gulf Island in Sointula but back then. You know, I don't know if you know the background of Sointula, it's Finnish people. And so it's kind of really mixed now. But there's still that ethic, it's got the first co-op in BC. It's kind of really unique. Anyways, so it was like a village. They'd take care of the kids so you could go away and work and, you know, take care of their kids when you came back and they took care of your kids so it was like that kind of thing. So it was easier for me to be able to do that.

JC [00:06:04] But my real first, just like steady, proper job, was at Windsong Roe. This guy, Jim O'Donnell. He had a float plane and all of us gillnetters and not so much on the seine boats, but I think it was mostly gillnetters and trollers would just throw away—because they'd clean their fish—and they'd just throw the guts and the roe overboard. So he got this great idea, I'm going to fly out to the grounds and collect the roe, the salmon roe from all the fish boats. And he got in touch with Japanese specialists and what they wanted for the market in Japan. And it was boxes of roe. Like full pieces of roe, not the individual eggs. So we had to basically learn how to tell what, if it was sockeye or spring salmon or pinks or whatever, just by what the roe looked like. So that was a learning curve and that was really interesting. And there was a little place down by the ferry terminal that he rented, and he got these guys, these technicians to come over and teach us and so it was amazing. So they had to be weighed, the exact right amount and we had to weave them together so they looked the same on the top and the bottom. So when they cracked the box open, it looked good, you know, it looked the same whether they did it upside down because they were just banded together. It kind of oozed up and each layer had salt on. So it was quite a thing to learn, right. And so we were really happy—there was about four of us—to have that job, like, right down the street. So that was amazing, right? Oh, I get to go to work every day and make money. We gotta keep this, you know? So back in the day, the Union had a boat and I can't remember. I've been trying to remember the name of it, but it went up and down the coast to the different...

PW [00:08:15] I think it was the Laur Wayne [ed note: the Laur Wayne was an IWA boat, not a UFAWU boat].

JC [00:08:21] Maybe it was probably after an activist or something. Anyway, they toured the coast and went to different camps and stuff, and they came to Sointula and so we were like, we got to keep this job! And we didn't really think about how it would affect the small entrepreneur that was doing this amazing thing. But being an entrepreneur, not a union at first. And he got really upset because we—I think it was Frank Cox was the first person

and I met Frank and he was all gung ho like, oh yeah, oh yeah. You guys want to have this? This is a sweet deal and you can have this all the time, and they can't lower your wages or. But we're not gonna—and we were really worried, right, we didn't want to cost him extra money and it was oh no, no, it's just to secure your job and, you know, and not be replaced by somebody else and still have this. But he got so upset. That was basically it, I didn't do it anymore. But we were trying to work with him and it wasn't a money thing. I think he felt that we went behind his back or something, I don't know how it evolved. That was 40 years ago, but that was my very first experience with the union and I still was really pro-union because of what they stood for, you know, and like there were so many abuses.

PW [00:09:46] Just to just to be clear on that, did he just fire you or did he stop the business or what?

JC [00:09:54] He didn't so much fire us. He just got really upset, like, you know, why have you done this? And then the next season he'd stopped doing it, because he was flying out. It was such an entrepreneurial thing, you know, nobody had ever done it. And he just made a business out of an idea, kind of thing. And I guess that's how businesses start. But it was really unique and special and I guess he felt hurt that, you know, rather than being the family or whatever we went outside to the union, like, oh my God. Anyway, that was that was my thing.

PW [00:10:33] So you were left with quite a considerable skill after that job, though.

JC [00:10:38] Yeah. Except no one else ever did it anywhere that I know of. It was really unique. I mean, somebody must have, but not that I knew of because it was, you know, I went on to work at Seafoods in Port Hardy, but that was to get the herring roe, you know, for herring season. But I don't know of anybody that was doing the salmon roe for the market like that. The herring roe was for the Japanese. But it went in buckets. It wasn't like this whole sort of artistry and the right weight and yeah, all of that. So it was a great skill and I thought I could use it, but it never really ever came up again in my life. But it was my first introduction to actually a proper job rather than just a net mending job or painting a boat here or there. Making pizzas. We made pizzas. We had a raving pizza business delivering them to the fishermen and stuff. So I sort of lived on those kinds of things in early days. And then, yeah, then I worked at Port Hardy at Seafood Products.

PW [00:11:52] So you and your son moved down to Port Hardy then?

JC [00:11:56] No, he just stayed like, you know, I got somebody to look after him, right? Like I said, it was like a village. If you had to go do something, you could just, he would be with friends that had kids and then vice versa. So that worked. But I still had to leave and go to Port Hardy and stay because I couldn't commute back and forth.

PW [00:12:18] And what did you do in Port Hardy? What was that job?

JC [00:12:20] That was roe, herring roe, back when it was rotten and they kept it on the dock till it basically fell apart. Oh. I can just say it was pretty nasty, but it was good money. So it was a good, proper job. But it was short, right? It was just for the herring season and I didn't—I don't know what happened. I didn't get on for salmon there and it was hard to go back and forth. So I think at some point I got a job trolling. But that wasn't union and that didn't last very long. And then I moved in '79 and did a bunch of other things. And then I ended up in Vancouver again, working at Prince Rupert Fisherman's Co-op, on Commissioner Street. And then it then changed to High Wave, the name of it, but it was

still run by the Prince Rupert Fisherman's Co-op, which was a co-op out of Rupert. But it was the Vancouver branch of it. So it was basically cold storage, fresh fish, cold storage. There was no canning. And so I worked there for till '83, I think. So I was there about 11 years, I think 11 or 12 years.

PW [00:13:51] And what was the work that you did?

JC [00:13:54] Well, I did whatever, you know, I got as much as I could and did that was an issue because the guys, they would get a new guy and he would come and he could do everything, he could hose down— we would be sent home, having worked there for years, and they'd be hosing down the dock because there might be a big halibut that came in. There was a two-tier wage thing. This was a real issue. This was a big thing in the fishing, in the shoreworker. We had quite a few like grievances and things that went to convention and stuff around this two-tiered thing. And we finally got it changed. If you wanted to do it, that was the issue. People didn't want to be forced into it. There was so much misinformation and fear mongering and everything. But we were like pretty tough. And we said, we want to work in the freezer. Well, no one should lift a 150 pound halibut, we can do it together. The guys should do it together. This is ridiculous and we worked here all these years and we're being sent home when some new guy, just because he's got muscles. We got muscle, you know, and we were—so I wasn't scared of the cold storage. So I started working in the cold storage and I really liked it. And then in, you know, in herring season, we popped the roe. And then salmon season I worked on the fresh fish. But mostly once we were allowed to go in—if you look it up there's a book I think that it's the book that they put out for people, it was like the pension. We finally got a pension plan after years and years, and I think it was the book about the pension plan, but it says in it, 'shoreworkers no longer frozen out' and there's a picture of us. Or 'shoreworker women no longer frozen out of cold storage', and we're standing in front of the shop freezer with all this mist in our freezer suit. They're like, you know, snowsuits type, skidoo suits or whatever. Big green ones with hoods on. You could hardly see us in this fog. Anyway, that was pretty cool.

PW [00:16:02] So were you in the union in that job?

JC [00:16:04] Yeah, that was a union, that was a union plant when I started. But that was the union that was fighting that first. But in the early days, you know, that things were grandfathered in and it was a real fight. Like we had to prove to the union that it was worth fighting. And through that whole process, I became a shop steward. And so then I was going to the hall, and I was learning about how the organizing of the union worked. And, you know, because I was not an organizer, but I was fighting that battle and then others for people. So I knew how to read the contract, figure out whether it was a violation. But then quite often I had to go and say, okay, we should be fighting this, it's right in the contract there. They're yeah but, yeah but and I'm like, no, you know, so it's like everything was a fight. But I learned to do that, and I learned that I really liked the union and especially the UFAWU. And then because they were, I felt ahead of their time, and even more so now looking back at some of the things. The first thing is, all the officers, but it was Jack Nicholson [ed: Nichol] was the president. And some of those guys, the officers of the union, went to jail for what they believed in. And not only that, they only took—they wouldn't take more in their wages than what the highest paid shoreworker, like the engineers in the—keeping the ice or the cold storage running, that sort of thing. You know, they had the highest union wage, and so the officers in the union wouldn't take more money than the highest paid person that was a member. And I just thought that was awesome, right. How many unions do that?

PW [00:18:05] And if I recall, I think Jack Nichol actually was from the shoreworker end, like he came out of Shoreworkers', which I think was quite unusual because most of the other presidents had been fishermen and and he—

JC [00:18:18] Yeah, or tendermen.

PW [00:18:20] So I think, now, do you recall when you were mentioning about two-tier, I believe it was a strike in, I think it was 1976, which was the first, I think it might have been the first shoreworker led strike on the very issue of the fact that there was not equal pay for equal work.

JC [00:18:40] Yeah, that was the basis of it, but it was called the two—it had been written in stone for so long that nobody questioned it until a bunch of us got—well, there was actually a woman that worked at BC Ice that had to sue the union. It was a huge thing that went on and everybody, 'oh, she's a troublemaker', right? But we sort of went, well, if she can do it, we're not going to sue the union, but this is winnable kind of thing, right? And so we finally got them onside, you know, to actually fight it and bring it to like—it didn't have to go to arbitration, but you know, to argue that, that we would go to arbitration if they didn't work with us. So then they sort of did it and tried to...

JC [00:19:26] Oh, also, there was a woman where I worked that actually went to the human rights and in order to sue the company for human rights, they had to sue the union. And so she wasn't a very union person, but she wanted her job. She did. She was a single mum, too. And, so she won that, and they were just blown away, the management. Like, how can she work here, when she sued us! Like who sues a company and then continues to work? Well, that's what the human rights is about. Like you guys don't get it. But it worked. And we all worked, she worked in the freezer, too, and she got to work on the dock for the first time because she fought that. You couldn't run the winch unless you were a guy. So it was pretty unequal and sexist. So we changed a lot of that.

JC [00:20:23] So I liked working there, but it was hard and I guess I'm a fighter or something, I don't know, because it seemed like it was in my blood. So after having gone through that, then they closed the plant down. And so then I went to work at Seafoods for salmon, which was right next door. And then at the foot of Gore at the Canadian Fish plant for herring and after Seafoods closed. Because they all sort of, with the free trade agreement all the plants started closing. That was a huge thing that the union fought against the free trade agreement because they used to have, there was a rule that so many fish had to be landed, you know, on land in a plant or something, or graded at least, right, before it went for processing wherever. So with the free trade agreement, they can have barges out in the ocean and they would just deliver and it would go down the States or wherever. So we all really suffered for jobs as shoreworkers.

JC [00:21:30] So it started going downhill then and plants started closing. But with the union we were really active in fighting that, and also for EI, for the workers. And it always seemed like the people that had the jobs were fighting for the rights of the people that weren't. But we did, the union was really in the forefront of fighting for the rights for, you know, because it was so seasonal, so that people could stay in the industry and have that as a living if they could be on EI. And the pension plan, too. It took a long time to get the pension and I think the fishermen got it or some sort of pension plan after we got it. But yeah, so there were some major fights and I just really liked the union because they did

those fights, the human rights. And I mean, it was a struggle convincing some of the old guard too, right, but they did do it. And I learned so much about, you know.

JC [00:22:36] Well, and then the other thing I got into the T Buck Suzuki Foundation, with Mae Burrows and others. And he was, they were way out there with the fish farms. They were saying it was going to be a blight, you know. And I learned so much then that I've been fighting against fish farms forever. But that's where it started, you know, because of the people, David. David Lane and Mae Burrows and others, and Michel Drouin who was the [assistant] editor of the Fishermen's paper. All those people were—they were so, they had insight, I think, is a good word. They had insight into what was going to happen or what could happen, or what we should be doing. Yeah, they were very smart people. So, you know, I really learned from from them.

PW [00:23:32] And did you, as a steward did you go to conventions all the time?

JC [00:23:36] Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, every year.

PW [00:23:40] And I'm curious about what kind of—how did how did you end up learning more and more about the workings of the union? Just from going to convention or?

JC [00:23:52] Well, that was a big part of it, because in those days we had a week-long convention. And so we would be—the shoreworkers—we would have our meetings and the fishermen would have their meeting. We all broke into groups on different, different resolutions that came to the convention. And then we would have to listen to people. They would go to the mic and speak on their issue or speak for their committee, right, what the committee had agreed on or was wanting the union to do. And so we would have to sit and listen through all of the fishermen stuff, about the different openings. And, you know, that's how I got to know Joy, because oh, she was a fighter, she was amazing.

PW [00:24:39] Sorry, Joy?

JC [00:24:42] Joy Thorkelson, yeah that you said you interviewed. So from convention, yeah, that was a big part of learning about the union because there was history and people, you know, who were telling their stories. And you got to meet people from all over the coast, like the Indigenous people. They had, what was it, was it the Native Brotherhood or the Native Fisherman's Brotherhood. Is that what it was? I can't remember exactly what it was called, but they had delegates and so all their issues. Because they were like just kept down for wages and stuff, and so they were into the union, but they had their own issues as well, right? But they were part of it. And I got to know a lot of Indigenous people working in their. I have an affinity for, not just—their issues and the things that they stand for and stuff. So I learned all that through the union. Yeah, that was a big part of it and T Buck Suzuki was huge. Then, everything really closed down and I couldn't get any work as a shoreworker or fishing or anything.

PW [00:26:06] So your last job was at the Canadian Fish, was that your last job?

JC [00:26:10] I kind of simultaneously, like I had to work at Seafoods and Canadian Fish, you know, to have proper job you know, at work rather than just one season. I could work two seasons or leave. It was a bit tricky to leave one and work at the other and go back, so stay on the seniority list. But it got harder and harder. And then I didn't really do canning. I think only 1 or 2 days at Canadian Fish, because there was nobody else in that department. But I worked in the cold storage, mostly in the fresh fish. So what happened

after that? There was a lot of different protests that we did. Really became like an activist through the union, because we were doing the whole general strike thing that happened in, was it in the '80s?

PW [00:27:10] Yes, '80s. Operation Solidarity.

JC [00:27:11] Yes, yeah. That was—we were huge in that with the union and just the whole philosophy, like the people that were in the UFAWU, like they it wasn't sort of the office people and we didn't know what was going on. They were really open and explained why, you know, and what the strategy was and why they were doing this. And we had to do this so that they couldn't manipulate us. And, you know, we just learned sort of the inner workings of things. So I learned to be, to have that head space. So I have it now, you know, with other things. I always know that other people aren't looking at something a certain way. And I go, well, they're doing it because of this, don't you know? Everybody knows that. No, I know it because I was in the, you know, learned it from the union. Other things we had big—oh yeah—that's what brought me up to. So then the plants basically closed down and I didn't have any income and I was working still with the union. And was it Mifflin? Minister of Fisheries, Mifflin decided to divide the coast into three sections, and the fisherman had to pick the river or up north or central coast, and it just devastated people. And they had the buy back and people were forced out, you know, they couldn't pay for their boats and things. And so we did a huge rally and I really remember this one because my friend, he was a fisherman, but we were good friends and he had the police picket his gillnetter on, I guess wherever the fisheries office was then on Burrard or Pender or something. And he pulled his gillnetter into the middle of the street and we had microphones set up and it was the first time that we weren't all at each other's throats. You know, like the sports fishing and the commercial fishermen and the shoreworkers and the fishermen and the First Nations people. We all came together, right? Or everybody was making speeches off the deck of the boat about how we're going the way of the cod fishery. And they were getting money so we should have some kind of restructuring money because, you're devastating the people that have lived, you know families, generations of people fishing and all of that. So we were so passionate about it and that. But I think the fact that we all came together like we rose above our differences. We got the Community Fisheries Development Centers.

JC [00:30:01] Well, we got money from the federal government, and I guess I think it was the union, basically the union that started these centers to retrain people. And so I was a program manager through the one in Surrey. And Ross, that brought his boat into the street, he was running one program. I was running another one. And so the way they worked was you went through the program. First of all, we went through a stewardship program, this is with the money from the federal government. So the union organized it for us to go get training from Langley Environmental Partnerships. And they taught us how to do GPS mapping and know all about indigenous plants. You know, the whole stream keeper --there's like 12 modules in the stream keepers thing about how you can tell if the water's polluted, like water quality testing, taking invertebrates from the bed of the stream and seeing what ones were there and what that indicated, and velocity and riparian zones, all that kind of thing. Right. So we all went through, a bunch of us went through that, and then we developed programs with Paul Kant from T Buck Suzuki. He was taking business management, but he was a gillnetter. So he knew how to start up a business. So it was actually first of all, Fisheries Development Centers and then it morphed into a co-op, Pacific Initiative. So I was there for several years and I made good money because we had to write funding proposals and then we'd write your wage in.

JC [00:31:49] But I had to do all so many things as part of that. I had the—I didn't have the GPS, I had like the plants and we were learning all about how to work as a landscaper. But all of those things were part learning computer skills and being able to speak to people. And all those other skills were part of the program, right? So people could go on to other jobs if they wanted to, but it was around helping the salmon. So that was the whole thing of it, right? They could get the salmon to come back because a lot of people killed themselves and it was really devastating. So to be able to—they would be willing to go in for this training if they thought it was helping the salmon. And then they just started learning, you know, more skills that they wouldn't have gone and taken a computer course, but they learned it if that was part of the GPS mapping that showed where the streams were, because pretty much now you know where all the streams are. But back then they would just develop over things. 'Oh, there was never a stream there. It went this way'. So you had to get them mapped, what the baseline. And so that was really important. So yeah. So I was part of all of that.

JC [00:33:17] Then because I was still active with T Buck, so I wasn't working in the union, but I always stayed with T Buck. And we started the T Buck Suzuki nursery because Bob, who was a gillnetter and he bought property and he had a stream running through his property. And so we thought, oh, we can get trees and do planting projects (because there were all these new places where we needed to plant trees), but it was getting the trees, right. So then the Trees Canada with the funding, this is all with writing funding proposals and getting—we had eight [unclear] and we had from DFO and from the province. I can't remember the names of all of them, but they all had different programs and so we would apply and get funding from. So we had like four different programs that we were getting money from because we could develop these program. And so I was bringing school kids to this nursery, and I got signage made like at the VanDusen Gardens, you know, those metal signs. But I used it from the Pojar MacKinnon book on native plants. So it had what the Native people use that plant for and then how that plant helped whatever. So what insects it attracted. And then they fell in and the fish would eat them, right. That sort of thing. So I was teaching that to these little kids, and we put a minnow trap down, and we would get cutthroat and coho in this little waterway that went through. And so I had it in a fish tank and they could come see. And I said, this is how a red is, I had red beads. And I think a lot of the hatcheries have that now just as an education thing. So we had that and they could identify the fish and they were all excited. So that was the sort of hook to get them to go. And we walked through the trail through—there was quite a big property—and then up at the top we could store trees. So we did that for quite a quite a while and I really enjoyed doing that, it was so fun.

PW [00:35:25] Where was that?

JC [00:35:26] That was in Surrey at 192nd. Yeah, just off of—you know where 200th, where the movie theater is there? The Collosus or whatever, you know, it was just off of there on 92nd Avenue. It was Bob [Zilcosky] I think he's passed now. But him and his wife, they had a big property, and they let us do it and put the signage up, and they built a walkway across the stream for the kids and the little shed. It was like our platform with a picnic table. And then we could have videos in there for the kids so they could come and learn about the man that digs for fish, and then they get all into it, and then we'd go look for the trap and learn about the plants and what they did for the salmon. Yeah, I really enjoyed doing that. But I learned all of that through, this was the union organized thing, right? We just went with it right? Then we turned it into our co-op, where the other ones closed down when the funding ran out. But that slowly petered out around 2000 or something. So I tried to get work in that, but I was competing with biologists that were out

of work and stuff, and so I couldn't get any work continuing to do that. So it was kind of a short couple of two, three years. And so, you know, just the fish farming stuff. I followed that, right, because the T Buck Suzuki Foundation was always fighting that. So I always stayed connected, and I was on the board of the T Buck for quite a while. But finally I just thought, well, I'm just doing volunteer work and I'm not going to be in the industry. So I went off of the board. And I guess that's the last stuff I really did with the union. But it was such a big part of my life and it's stayed with me and I learned so much. So it's not, I don't think, your average union. And then it became the UF... now it's UNIFOR but it was.

PW [00:37:47] CAW.

JC [00:37:49] Yeah, CAW, that was a huge thing. Oh, 'should we become part of the CAW, we'll lose our voice', you know and that slowly did happen. And and course there were less and less people working in the industry.

PW [00:38:04] That's for sure.

JC [00:38:05] So we lost our strength of numbers. So yeah, it was CAW then UFC something and then it became UNIFOR. So T Buck is still in operation and they're still there, but it's... Oh, and then the other thing, the herring sales.

PW [00:38:32] Oh, yes, I remember those.

JC [00:38:32] That was generated by the union. I'm just trying to think of all the things that I learned or did because of the union, right, because that's what you want to know, union stuff. So that was so cool, being able to go and sell buckets of herring at 5:00 in the morning. They had a huge line-ups and that was a fundraiser until the government stopped that. There's somebody doing it now, but it's not the union run thing anymore. Just a few seiners that started something for cancer for kids. But this was the CKNW sale that was with UFAW. Yeah. So I did that for years. What else did we do? They did all kinds of things like that. UFAWU was a good union.

PW [00:39:30] It was. And as you said, it was quite unique in terms of its, the organizational structure. So thinking back with all the work you did, as a shoreworker, what's the fondest memory that jumps out?

JC [00:39:49] From the working in the plant?

PW [00:39:51] Yes.

JC [00:39:55] Well, it was stressful, but I think that winning to be able to work in the cold storage and have my seniority count or not to be discriminated because I was a woman. I think that was a huge battle and it felt really good. Although it was just, allowing me to work harder, it was hard work. But I got to work, I had a job, and I wanted to stay in the industry. I really like the fishing industry.

PW [00:40:30] In general, did you work with a lot of women, when you were a shoreworker or were you often in the minority, as a woman?

JC [00:40:41] Oh, no. Well, it depended on the part, right? Like the cold storage was the men. And they drove the forklift, and they did the guy stuff. And the women all worked on the lines. There was a few guys that worked on the salmon, because I worked fresh fish

cold storage. So we didn't do canning, so we had to clean the fish, you know, on the line and so on. They had guys heading. But it was a lot, it was dominated by women. And for the herring roe, taking the roe out of the herring, that was mostly all women.

PW [00:41:18] When when you were working on the line, was there a lot of pressure to go as fast as you could?

JC [00:41:24] Oh, yeah. That was the whole—because what did they call it—fish are a product that deteriorates. There's a name. Deteriorating product, right? So it had to be handled as fast as possible. So that was, you know, any jobs like that, it's all about being fast. But the one thing that, having said that, is in between when the early days when I didn't work in the unionized plant, I got jobs doing stuff in other non-union plants and, oh, my goodness. Like I remember the one on Georgia Street. It was just a little place and they steamed shrimp and crabs. The Chinese ladies were incredible. They were just incredible. And they worked down at Campbell Avenue. I don't know if you guys remember Campbell Avenue. Yeah. That's sad that that's gone. Anyways, we worked at this place, and we were being paid by the pound for shrimp and crab, but we had to peel them. So initially when we first got there, they were pretty big. It was like small prawns, you know, big shrimp. And so we could make a reasonable, you know, because back then seven or eight dollars was a good wage, like in the '70s. And so we started out making that. But then the shrimp got small. So you had to go faster and faster and faster, you know, 'till they were little shrimp. And I'm like, 'oh my God, I'm not even making minimum wage, I'm working my ass off'. So, you know, we went and complained, as you do. You know how to do that if you're a union person. Other people just laughed and we went and complained that this isn't working for us. What are you going to do for us? And I think they gave us, they decided that they would pay us like minimum wage or something. So we weren't working for under minimum, but it just was an example of the difference between the union plant and the non-union plant. You know, how valuable it was in that type of job because they were always wanting you to go faster and do more with less.

PW [00:43:59] Yeah, when you were describing some of that, it made me think about health and safety which wasn't very prominent in those days either.

JC [00:44:08] Yeah, I did that, too. I was on the Health and Safety Committee.

PW [00:44:13] And where there are a lot of injuries?

JC [00:44:20] There wasn't any that hugely stand out to me. There's a lot of things that could have happened in where I worked, but there was people that got their feet caught in augers and, you know, working in the ice house and shoveling ice in. And and if they didn't have the grates secured properly, like I was always making sure of those things, because I was scared, you know, that something horrific would happen, because it did happen. They said the safety manual is written in blood, right? Because they don't put it in there until someone's maimed. Then they make a regulation.

PW [00:44:59] So were you on a health and safety committee at just about every workplace that...

JC [00:45:03] Mostly at Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op, because I worked there the longest stretch. I wasn't on any committees because I only worked like the salmon season, or I'd work the herring season when I had to move around to the different plants. So I wasn't so much on committees then, but at the—well, it was called High Wave in the latter

years. I was on the committee then. And that's where the woman that that actually went to human rights and lodged a complaint. Having gone through that, see, I was just trying to follow the contract, right? And learn the contract; so seniority.

JC [00:45:49] You'd get a call-out when you get laid off because we all got laid off when the product slowed down and then you'd get called back. So you were on call and the lady that called out, she'd sometimes omit people because she didn't want to keep calling. And if they weren't home, you know, because sometimes you have to keep going back, call later, whatever her reason was. But she wouldn't admit that she missed somebody. And this woman, this Chinese lady was saying how she—I heard someone talking about that she had not been called, and so I just asked her and she goes, 'oh yeah, I was home, you know, I should have been called. But I don't want to sign anything'. You know, she was scared to do anything. And I said, 'well, you shouldn't have to sign anything'. 'Oh, yeah, they told me if I have a grievance I have to sign'. So that's intimidation big time and so I was fighting that and I had to go to the union and say, okay, this is a violation of the contract. We should be able to grieve this. And she doesn't want to grieve it because she's scared she has to sign papers and then they're going to do it more or they're going to give her a rough time in other ways, you know, because she was a troublemaker. This forelady was very intimidating and they were racist. And so anyway, I kept complaining about it and then I went to her and I said, 'look, I know you don't want to do this and I don't think you should have to but if I was to come to you with a cheque, would you take it'? 'Oh yeah, we'll take the money'. So I finally won that and the manager had complained that I was violating her human rights just because this other woman had said that they violated her human rights. He figured that was a good, you know, because she didn't want to sign it and she didn't want to— so I was violating her human rights by advocating for her. You know, it was just ridiculous. But they tried to intimidate with that. So I had to be strong because I could have gone, oh geeze, got scared and not done it but I knew I was right. So the union made me strong that way. Because I had to fight them to get them to back me up too. So once we won things it was like, vindicated, you know? Yeah, we won that one.

JC [00:48:23] But it's just a good example of things that they would try to do, like even in the union plant. So it was really important that the shoreworker, the stewards. Because I was just a steward I wasn't—well, I guess I was a chief shop steward for a while until someone else came. But then you went to meetings and you really learned about things when you became a shop steward. So I learned more because of that.

PW [00:48:55] And what about any strikes—can you recall any strikes that you were involved in?

JC [00:49:02] Well, the one you mentioned. And then I think there was one around '73. Was it '73? It was, I just remember people bringing us sandwiches on the picket [line]. See, in the fishing industry, you only have a short window. Perishable product, that's what I was trying to think of, that term. Because it's perishable product, you have more pressure on the companies if you go on strike at the right time, right, and they've got product coming in and they gotta deal with it right away. So you tend to get your contract, instead of having it dragging on forever. So there was a lot of learning that. What was your question? I think I missed it.

PW [00:49:51] I was just wondering, also when it came to taking job action, like were stewards involved and, I do believe with the UFAWU, everybody had to vote on whether or not to to go on strike.

JC [00:50:05] Oh, definitely. Yeah. They didn't dictate that we went on strike. It was our—we had to choose whether we wanted to. And sometimes it was like really close with people just didn't want it didn't want to. There's fighters and non-fighters, right.

PW [00:50:22] I also understand there was a bit of a tension between, fishers, fishermen in the north and in the south and I think it was related to issues of different times that the fish were running and so it created tension if there was a strike.

JC [00:50:43] Yeah, for sure. And like the Mifflin Plan was what they called it, when he divided the coast up. That was huge, right. So you might have been—so mostly the smaller boats would start because the fish go up to Alaska and then they go from there to the different streams, right, that they were born in. So they work their way down as the summer progresses. So fishermen would start in the north and work the whole coast and finish on the river in August and September. If they wanted to fish for all the different species. So you couldn't do that anymore. You had to pick for four years whether you wanted to fish in the North or the Central Coast or the—Well, who knows where the fish are going to be the most. It was a guessing game forever, right? That's the nature of the fishing industry. So having to pick could bankrupt you if you picked the wrong area. So that created huge issues with the northern fishermen and the river fishermen. It had a lot to do with that. Yeah, there's other issues too, probably, but that was a big one. Because it became the demise of a lot of people that were trying to pay for their boats or, you know had to fix up their boats or just had little gillnetters and stuff. So they had this buyback and they didn't get the money that they'd paid for it.

PW [00:52:20] Well the industry I mean, it's really a shell of what it was at one time. As you mentioned, for all sorts of different reasons.

JC [00:52:30] But the union was so ahead of that, trying to stop those things. That's what I remember about the foresight that they had. Whether it was the fish farms or the different plans that DFO was trying to put in place and other things, you know. And the environment. Environmental, right, with T Buck Suzuki. He was way—T Buck Suzuki was an environmentalist in the '50s, wanting to save the fish for the future. He was a Japanese, I think he was a trawler or a gillnetter out of Steveston. So yeah, they were ahead of the—I don't know how you articulate that. They were like ahead of the times.

PW [00:53:20] They were. I know, we actually interviewed a relative of T Buck Suzuki for doing a podcast and that's what she said, like he was way ahead of his time. He was starting to worry about issues of the Fraser River and how it was so polluted and how it would affect the fish back before anybody was even talking about that.

JC [00:53:46] Yeah. And not just for him or his family, but for the industry, for the salmon, for the salmon's sake, for keeping the stocks alive.

PW [00:53:57] So I don't know, Zoe, if there's any question that you might like to ask or?

ZM [00:54:05] No. Not really. I don't know—I didn't know that much about the industry myself. It's really like it was the family that did. But, I'm really liking listening to all the stuff. I remember people talking about it, you know, when they split the coast and all that.

PW [00:54:22] Yeah. So you managed to avoid working in the industry, though, Zoe, except for that very brief time. I don't know if that's what...

ZM [00:54:30] A couple of herring seasons and that was it. And that's because the kids were little, and I had a neighbour that was, you know, I wanted to go in and give it a try. And, boy, that.

JC [00:54:39] Make some money! You make good money, right?

ZM [00:54:43] Yeah. It was hard stuff. Harder than I ever thought.

JC [00:54:46] Yeah. Everybody had carpal tunnel syndrome.

ZM [00:54:48] Oh my gosh. The first time I came home, I had to cut my sweatshirt off it was so stiff.

JC [00:54:53] Well, you can imagine when I was talking about when I worked in the early '70s at Seafood Products in Port Hardy, and they would leave the fish in totes on the dock for ten days, in the sun.

ZM [00:55:07] Oh my gosh.

JC [00:55:08] And then you didn't get carpal tunnel because they just ripped open. And I guess the roe was riper or something. It was. But you had to be really careful, but it was much easier to do. And then it changed and they started freezing them. And then they had to put them, it was called upwelling. You had to stir them around until they thawed out. And so sometimes they were quite rubbery and stuff.

JC [00:55:35] So I wrote a song about the different seasons.

PW [00:55:41] You wrote a song?

JC [00:55:42] Yeah. The Highway of Blues. They called it, the Co-op Highwave, it was renamed. And then so we called it the Highwave Blues. I was about loading boxes into the trucks for shipping and, and putting pink salmon onto the table. It just reminded me of it because it was like 2,000 pounds a day or away you go or something that was like...

PW [00:56:12] So did George Hewison ever sing it?

JC [00:56:17] George Hewison, no. No.

PW [00:56:20] Because he had a band right. Like he used to sing all the time.

JC [00:56:21] Yeah, I remember him. I didn't know him that well but he was quite the character, yeah. What was the name of his band?

PW [00:56:31] Oh my goodness...

JC [00:56:32] I have seen them, but it was so long ago.

PW [00:56:36] It'll come to me in a minute.

JC [00:56:38] Yeah. No, nobody caught on to it. It was just us. We would insist on singing it after we had a few drinks. So it wasn't, you know, anything that anybody wanted to record, but it was, if you'd had done it, it was worth, you know, it was valuable.

PW [00:56:56] Zoe, when you worked, did you pop the roe? Is that what they called it? Was that what you had to do?

ZM [00:57:04] Yeah, we'd stand there and you had to split it open it, and just go along this long, slanted line. And we used to be there all day, and it was actually it was pretty exciting. You know, being there. I'm glad I got to do that for a little bit. Yeah.

JC [00:57:18] And then it went to the graders and the grading table, remember?

ZM [00:57:21] Yeah.

JC [00:57:24] Oh, it was so many little tiny, picky differences. So I remember, I worked on it for a while and it was, 'oh, no, that doesn't go there'. Oh my God. You know, because the Japanese would only pay for, you know, they would pay more money for the perfect ones, if it had a little crack or something it was—

PW [00:57:44] And I know that that was an issue as well, in terms of—this is something that Joy mentioned—is that, the graders, the men got more than the women, when they were grading the roe as well, until that was finally sorted.

JC [00:58:00] Yeah, so they could run the pump, and pump the fish out of the boat. They could work in the cold storage like way more hours and more longer term, because it was a cold storage plant that I worked at. So whenever somebody—and then we started doing custom, so we would freeze fish for other companies. So then they would say, okay, we want our fish. So they always needed somebody. So the guys would get the jobs in the freezer and then they would work longer and more hours. We would be there for years and we're going home and they're out hosing the dock because the halibut's coming. It was so annoying. And costly. So there was many ways that that whole two-tier wage or was it? How did they? Group one and and group two, I think that was just grandfathered in to everything. Like they didn't want to fight it. They're just 'well, it's what we've negotiated over all these years'. You know, 'we're not going to change it'. So we changed it. That was my biggest triumph was when we actually changed that. We're allowed to work in -20. [laughter] It was a glorious job. It was just what we wanted at the time because we got more work.

PW [00:59:27] Okay, well, I think we're probably, unless either of you or anybody wants to add anything or have a question. I think maybe we have come to the end.

JC [00:59:39] And being on the boat and fighting that fight to get the money from the federal government, this is when we said the salmon are going the way of the cod and we need a program. Winning that, those are my highlights, right. Winning that, woman's fight. And, you know, if you look it up—do you have access to the different publications that—I mean, I'm sure you have The Fisherman, but do you have the publications that, the little shiny pension plan book for the shoreworkers?

PW [01:00:15] Yeah, I don't know if...

JC [01:00:16] I'll send it to you if you wanted that picture. So I'll run away and get it, I know where it is.

PW [01:00:25] Okay. No, I haven't seen that one, I know, interestingly, Zoe, we just got The Fisherman newspaper has now been digitized, and so we have access to all of those issues. It's very interesting.

ZM [01:00:47] I mentioned this on our little chat that we had because, I mean, it's just so interesting. And then if people hear how much, at least I enjoyed it. I'm hoping I can get some of these other ladies to talk.

PW [01:01:02] Yeah. That's what, Natasha, Zoe's got, out of the first outreach, she's got a chat group, and so she's going to now say that she's done this and hopefully other people will, be willing to do it as we've got the first guinea pig and it wasn't too bad.

ZM [01:01:20] No, it was great.

NF [01:01:23] That's wonderful. I love hearing about, you know, all the union stories and stuff. But I also really like hearing about what the job was like on a day to day, like what was the experience working this job?

JC [01:01:34] See all the mist from that was back in what would be big rooms with shelves. And that's what you see in the back, you know, almost like a freezer, an actual stand up freezer with shelves.

PW [01:01:49] Right. And there you are with your an apron.

JC [01:01:52] Yeah. All these are frozen, right. And the sheets, like cookie sheets. Big huge ones. And we put the fish in a certain way. So we can do that. No, they're saying no, you can't do it because you can't lift a 200 pound halibut.

PW [01:02:09] That would be great if you send that.

JC [01:02:11] That's me and and Shannon and Sandra. So there was three women and three guys like in the cold storage.

ZM [01:02:20] Shannon, yeah.

JC [01:02:22] But this is the one—well, where does it say? Oh, I'm not going to find it. But it said, the way they did it, 'this is working for you fishermen, shoreworkers and tendermen'. And we were on on the cover of that, in the photo.

PW [01:02:40] Right. So are we still recording, by the way?

NF [01:02:45] Yeah, we're still recording.

PW [01:02:48] Yeah, because when I pressed the record button, it actually stopped the recording.

JC [01:02:55] Because you could, look this up. I'm sure they have it in archives in the office somewhere.

NF [01:03:04] Jackie, I had a question. When you did win the right to work in the cold storage with the men, how were you treated by the other workers at the cold storage? Like how were the women who were now allowed to work in there with the men, how were they treated?

JC [01:03:20] Well, they had to work with us, but they weren't—well, depends on who you were. I mean, if you were young and beautiful. (laughter) Well, seriously, like this one guy who's going out with this other one, she had it a little bit easier, I mean, attitude wise. Right. She still had to do the same job. But if you weren't, you know, chummy with some, right, you were just another one of the guys, which is fine. But there are nice to, you know, they were were friends with the other guys when they weren't friends with you. There was kind of the cold shoulder. Yeah. And then our attitude was we should work together. This is a hard job. Let's work together. But they come from this old guys school thing. Whereas, you know, if I can lift—the bigger halibut I lift, the better when their backs are all burnt out. I think it's just stupid, but they'd been doing it forever, and you're not going to change. I've always thought that. And then I tried to teach people, even in my other jobs in warehouses and stuff. If you do it this way, if you work smart, you know, you do it this way, you'll save your back. But if they're young, they just go, yeah, yeah. And just do it their way. So that's how it is. And they were kind of like that. We were trying to bring in new change. Why don't we? Why don't we both do this halibut? No, no way.

PW [01:04:49] I guess it's not such a problem anymore, unfortunately, because the halibut are not as big.

JC [01:04:54] Yeah. Oh yeah, we'd get huge halibut. And we had to freeze them. And that was one thing like dip them, dipping them in this frozen, in the water so they would freeze. And then you'd let them stay for a while and get really hardened and you have to dip them again. We had these big water baths, that salty water baths in the cold storage. And so that was a whole thing. And then after they were frozen we had to take the fins. You know, like halibut has a fin that runs along either edge. And so you had to trim those off. So they had like a machete with a wooden handle on either side, and you had to hook the halibut up under your, the tail sort of up under your arm a bit and then run it down the side, and some of the guys could just do it. I remember this one guy was always going.. Like, 'how do you do it? Like, why do I have bruises?' I'm not doing it right, and he'd come and show off and show us, it'll go like butter. And just do it. Oh, it was so hard. But we could do it. But it was hard to learn the technique and stuff like that. So there was the odd guy that would actually show you the easier way. There's other guys who would just let you struggle. I mean, everybody had a learning curve whether you're a man or a woman but if they didn't want to show you, it could be difficult. But over time, we figured it out.

PW [01:06:31] Well, that was very interesting. Thank you so much.

JC [01:06:36] I'm not sure if that was what you wanted.

PW [01:06:38] Absolutely.

JC [01:06:39] I can tell stories, but you don't want stories. You want sort of the history of the union.

PW [01:06:45] We want stories too.

JC [01:06:48] Well, it was kind of a combination.

PW [01:06:50] Yes, it was. And that was very interesting about the job retraining because I didn't know about that part.

JC [01:06:58] Yeah, the community fisheries development centers. They really helped a lot of people. Whether they went on to do, you know some of the people in my program, I know they went on. Like they learned how to do what's called soft engineering, where you make instead of putting rocks in to keep a bank stabilized, you make bundles, you cut willows and you make bundles of willows, and you stake them in to the hillside, and they grow roots and they stabilize the whole thing. And so that was part of my program, bioengineering it was called. And they learned that. And I know one guy that was still working at a place. Like we could get practicums. And after they went through the training, we'd try and get practicums. Doing that work. And he was still working there for quite a few years after. So that was kind of—makes you feel good. But, a lot of them didn't. Because I think a lot of people you don't—only certain people will learn the technical aspect of a job, you know, a lot of them were just for the labour, especially in the fishing industry. So it's very hard to learn techniques for a new job when you were just a labourer. So you'd go on to be a laborer. But the idea behind it was great at getting people in and getting some retraining because they cared about the fish. So using their passion. Because like I say, it was really devastating for them. I can only imagine. Like my family wasn't in the fishing industry. But if your parents and your parent's parents, your whole history is built on the fishing industry, your house that you grew up in was paid for by the fishing, like your everything, your world, is about that, right? I can only like, try to imagine how devastating it would be if you couldn't do it anymore. So I helped people in that way so that was a good thing.

PW [01:09:26] Yeah. Okay. Well, I think we have got a lot of really interesting stuff and thank you so much for volunteering to be part of this project.