

Interview: Lorna Waghorn-Kidd (LWK)

Interviewer: George Davison (GD)

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Transcription: Warren Caragata

GD [00:00:06] Thanks, Lorna, for coming in today. Just to kick it off, I'm George Davison. I'm doing the interview for the BC Labour Heritage Centre. We are on the unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh. I have a series of questions that I'm going to ask you: family background, working life, politics at work, and more general labour issues. And we'll just start off by asking you your full name.

LWK [00:00:33] Lorna Waghorn-Kidd. I should say, Lorna Audrey Waghorn-Kidd.

GD [00:00:38] Okay. Yeah. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

LWK [00:00:42] I was born in Prince Rupert in 1953. My father was a government employee. He was the deputy government agent, I believe. And before I was six years old, we'd lived in Terrace, Cranbrook, back to Terrace, and then we moved to Pouce Coupe. And then we moved to Dawson Creek.

GD [00:01:13] Whoa. Big town.

LWK [00:01:14] Yeah. And so by 1976, I'd settled here. I graduated in Dawson Creek.

GD [00:01:21] Okay. Wow. So all across the north?

LWK [00:01:25] Yep.

GD [00:01:25] So tell me what it was like growing up in all those little towns.

LWK [00:01:29] It was very good. But I've realized that it wasn't for me because I had a bigger scope on the world. The first BCGEU strike that we had, we had what we called a war room. And all the zone reps would show up. And in the war room, I think there was, probably out of 12 people, eight of them had worked or lived in Dawson Creek, including Dianne Wood. And she moved down here when my father took a job with the government, back with government again. And she worked in the same office as my father.

GD [00:02:18] So you graduated from high school in Dawson Creek?

LWK [00:02:21] Yeah.

GD [00:02:22] And then moved down here after that?

LWK [00:02:24] I lived in Port Alberni for a couple of years.

GD [00:02:27] So you were working there?

LWK [00:02:30] Yes. But in Port Alberni, it was a very closed community, especially in those days. And if you didn't know somebody, it was very hard to find work.

GD [00:02:38] Okay.

LWK [00:02:39] So I ended up working at the Dairy Queen. So I know how to make those cones. And then we moved up here in 1976, and I got a job with the federal government, in the EI office, at an employment insurance office, as a typist and would type out all the letters. And that's where I learned Mackenzie wasn't spelled with 'M-A-C capital K'? It was all one word. So, yes, I worked there from probably July to November when I got a job with the government, B.C. government, working at the land registry office.

GD [00:03:27] Okay. Tell me about the land registry office in 1976.

LWK [00:03:31] Well, there was no technology.

GD [00:03:37] Old typewriters that didn't work very well.

LWK [00:03:40] So there was old typewriters. We had the big registers. And we actually—they made the titles smaller because you used to have an original of the title, a copy. And then there was—we had a photocopy machine. But before we had the photocopy machine, we had to make extra copies for the City of Prince George, the regional district. And, you know, if it was McBride and all of those communities, we had to send copies out for their records so they could keep their records updated. And so and then I became—

GD [00:04:15] —it sounds like a busy office.

LWK [00:04:17] It was, because it was for just south of Williams Lake, all across the north to just outside of Vanderhoof, so it covered Fort St. James and that, so we were for the North. So it was interesting. I learned a lot. I worked in the survey department. I talked with land surveyors when they were trying to register their plans and stuff like that. We worked together to make sure everything was done accurately, because they were all legal documents. So you couldn't make mistakes. You had to make sure everything was correct.

GD [00:05:04] And you were saying your boss was checking how many you did in any given day? Is that a daily thing?

LWK [00:05:11] No. And he would think we didn't know it because, you know, you might be doing something else, helping somebody else do something. And you could see him out of the corner of your eye. And I, of course, would go over and say, there is 30 titles there. I would have had 35 or 40, but for my typewriter. And he would just look at me, says, I'm not really paying attention. And I just rolled my eyes, right.

GD [00:05:38] How would you get a new typewriter?

LWK [00:05:40] So I got a new typewriter. Oh, and this is the days where you had to budget, right? It wasn't wise to use all of your budget money in the provincial government. So many offices didn't. But my typewriter, you'd start typing and just for no reason, it would just keep typing on its own. So I would have to rip my title up because I couldn't make a mistake. If I made a mistake, I had to start all over again. So that was the process. It was—I enjoyed it. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about properties and surveying and stakes and property lines and easements.

GD [00:06:24] And so did you kind of work up the ladder as—

LWK [00:06:29] I did—

GD [00:06:30] —as a clerk typist to a—

LWK [00:06:30] I started work as a Clerk Typist Two. And I worked my way up. I became a Clerk Three and got to do what they called in those days certificates of encumbrance. And then I became examiner, where I started examining the legal documents to ensure that they were valid for registration, that they would meet the legal requirements. And then within that department, there was a survey department and I worked for a long time in the survey department registering plans and working with people to find—going back to the original Crown grants, like the original Crown grant for downtown Prince George was granted, I think, in about 1911. And when you do a survey, you had to go back to the original Crown grant and check for creeks and rivers and the railway line, the Grand Trunk Pacific, and the telegraph all across the north. And so we did all of that work, you know, because those records often had to show up on the plan, the current plan. And in all of that (this is just by-the-by_ I was doing a search up by the Pine River, up between Dawson Creek and Chetwynd and looking at—pulled out a Crown grant and I was really surprised to see my father's name on it and one of his friends from Pouce Coupe.

GD [00:08:17] Oh, they bought a chunk of land.

LWK [00:08:18] Yes, but they didn't build the cabins there. They moved further up the river. But that was just such a fluke. It was, oh my goodness, dad's been around. So, that was really interesting. And it was all the historical stuff. We could go back and find out who owned—how something was developed. We had the royal—the military in from Britain. They would come out and they'd done surveys of Soda Creek where they plotted plans. You know, when they did downtown Prince George, they were 25-foot lots and—so I got to learn a lot about things and where things were. And the most interesting call I got was from somebody from the States who wanted to know where the red barn was just outside of Prince George (laughter). I said, which red barn? So, yeah, so that was one we talked about for a long time.

GD [00:09:28] So how did you get involved in the union?

LWK [00:09:31] Well, when I got my government job, dad says to me, 'You realize this is a union job, don't you?' And I said, 'Yes.' He says, 'So what are you going to do?' And I thought about it and I thought, shit, this is—said 'I'm going to go to my union meetings.' He says, 'That's the right answer.' But the ironic part was the first time we were on strike, I was a zone rep, so we had to, we did duty and on weekends it was a really small crew. And so it was a Sunday night. And I was the only one in the area office.

GD [00:10:12] So what year is this?

LWK [00:10:14] That would have been, I think it was '81, '82 maybe.

GD [00:10:19] Okay.

LWK [00:10:22] Yes. And so I'm looking through a book on the history of the union and I find my father's name. He led the walkout in Prince Rupert in 1959.

GD [00:10:35] Wow. Way to go.

LWK [00:10:37] Yeah. So, that was interesting.

GD [00:10:42] So, zone rep, what does that involve?

LWK [00:10:47] That's when you're in strike mode, when you're preparing for a strike and taking strike votes. So I was in the administrative services component, which was the clerical component. And we were the largest component.

GD [00:11:05] So in Prince George, how many workers would there be?

LWK [00:11:08] So my local covered part of Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, McBride, Valemount, Mount Robson, Mackenzie—

GD [00:11:13] —most of the north, half of the north.

LWK [00:11:14] From Area 11. So I think there was over 300 clerical workers throughout. And so, because I was involved in—very active in the union—I don't know why—but anyway, Ed Bodner— no, he wasn't here then. I can't remember who the staff rep was. Anyway, it doesn't really matter. They asked me to be a zone rep, so I said sure, but what does that do? So what it was, we had picket captains for each worksite and in the BCGEU office, we had on the walls lists of every single worksite that we had, how many members were there. And we would assign a captain. And then we would have as the picket captain, and then we would have zone reps. And so my responsibility would be for one of my areas, I did the Plaza 400, the experimental farm, the jail. And one of the scales. I think, like in my loop, we tried to make the loop geographical to save us some time. So that was very interesting. That was the first time.

LWK [00:12:45] And we did a target strike first of all. And it was the liquor stores. And we paid them target pay and then, as the start. And then, the rest of us went out because it wasn't making a difference. So we all went out on strike and it didn't last as long as Operation Solidarity did. And in those days as a government employee, the B.C. labour code said that as government employees, if you did not vote in a strike vote, it was an automatically 'no' vote. So we had to go out and find every vote. So for the first two strikes, we sent people up into the maternity ward to get a vote. We visited people all over the place. We found the brand inspector out in Dunster. It was really interesting that we found all but, I think, three votes. And I think out of those three, two were Rand formulas and they just said they weren't going to vote, but they did have the opportunity. We wanted people to express their choice and not let government decide what their vote was going to be. So we tracked them all down.

GD [00:14:17] So labour relations weren't particularly good with the Bennet government before 1983.

LWK [00:14:24] Oh no.

GD [00:14:24] And then it got a lot worse.

LWK [00:14:26] It did. So under Bennett, he brought in some really awful legislation. Bills One, Two and Three were the real bad ones. And what it meant is that the government was going to take our seniority away. And because we're protected, you have to be fired for cause. And they were going to take that away so they could get rid of whoever they wanted.

GD [00:14:55] For whatever reason.

LWK [00:14:56] Exactly. So one of my coworkers says, 'well, that doesn't sound too bad.' And I looked at her and I said, 'I'm sorry, you're fat and blue-eyed. You could be the one that could be told to go.' She said, 'They can't do that to me.' I said, 'That's what—'

GD [00:15:11] —this legislation says.

LWK [00:15:13] '—no fault means,' you know. 'Oh, oh,' she said. So she was very active on the picket line. But, you know, like it was a shock.

GD [00:15:21] So the picket lines came a bit later, though the legislation, I think, was July and then things started to heat up over the summer.

LWK [00:15:28] Yeah, we actually did a kind of a mini-work stoppage where we went out and explained the legislation to other worksites. Then we had, it was an escalation actually. And then, the labour movement in Prince George, because of the labour council, actually, pulled everybody together and there were some groups that weren't actually in the House of Labour at that time, but they participated because in Prince George we believed, it didn't matter what union you were in, we're all one community.

GD [00:16:04] And, you know, teachers, college instructors were unionised, but not in the Fed—

LWK [00:16:09] And IWA, I think, and HEU were still out of the House of Labour at that point. But we all worked together. So, and again, it started with —the BCGEU had actually had some negotiations and the components, all but Component 12, which was the admin services component—what the boys in the union called the weak link—they all had their own component agreements done. Component 12 didn't. So we went out and we found our members, had them vote, and we did—I think we had a 96 percent strike vote amongst the weak link of the union.

GD [00:17:02] That's pretty strong.

LWK [00:17:02] So that was how everybody else really got to go on strike was because, admin services, we were in the fortunate spot. We could make it so we were legally able to go on strike. So we were off for a week and the plan was for groups to roll out. And I think the teachers rolled out the second week, right?

GD [00:17:25] Right.

LWK [00:17:25] And it was interesting because we had burn barrels all over town. Oh my God, business was crazy, they didn't think it was right. We had burn barrel, I can remember, up at the health unit on Edmonton Street and, you know, like who thinks, Edmonton Street, a health unit, you know, there's clerical, there's nurses and all of that. Well, we heard that people were going in at night to gather their supplies. And some of them were doing meetings with moms and stuff like that. So we brought up the situation at a labour council group meeting. It was a campaign meeting because we all would—it was daily meetings.

GD [00:18:09] And these meetings were in your office were they not?

LWK [00:18:11] No, those meetings were actually in the—yes, they were. Sorry. Because there was too many people.

GD [00:18:16] Right.

LWK [00:18:18] So they said, Where are you going and where—are you expecting problems? And when I said, 'Honestly, I think we're going to have a problem up at the health unit.' Well, the carpenters were the first ones up and said, 'Well, we'll have our crew up there.' So they joined us and we had absolutely no problem. So, you know, we all did work together to make sure everybody was safe. We tried to keep everybody warm.

GD [00:18:48] Yeah. It's November now. And then Jack Munro went to Kelowna, and it all ended.

LWK [00:18:56] And I was on the floor of the Fed after that. So, I walked in and, you know, and nobody was talking to the IWA. Like, they were bad folks. So I'm very naive, right? You know, because I hadn't really been super active and I think this might have been my first Fed. And I'm saying, well, why? You know, like that whole group? You know, like, why is everybody mad at Jack Munro? And our president at that time was Norm Richards. And he came—I was sitting at lunch and he came over and he had his wife Blanche because Norm knew so many people. But she was the one that would remind him of who everybody was. So he said, 'Lorna, what's wrong?' And I said, 'I'm really upset, you know, like the IWA just walked off the floor.' I said, 'that really hurts me. You know, like, why would they do that?' And he said, 'Lorna, Lorna, we will work it out, don't worry.' So again, I saw how labour pulled themselves together and realized that for the good of working people, we all had to work together. So, yeah, that was interesting.

GD [00:20:15] So. That was your first Fed meeting of probably many. You were continuing to work in the land title office here?

LWK [00:20:27] I did. And I worked and I became the local chairperson. So that means I went down for component meetings, Component 12. And I worked my way up there. For a short period of time I was the chairperson of the component.

GD [00:20:44] So that's through the rest of the '80s?

LWK [00:20:46] Yeah.

GD [00:20:46] Bill 19 and all that kind of stuff.

LWK [00:20:48] They came in. Yeah. And I can remember we had a big protest and I think it was outside the Holiday Inn. Yes. And we had a soup kitchen. We were feeding people. And it was really kind of funny because, of course, as soon as there's free food, there's some people that really are starving. So we were handing food out, and I was ladling it out and the Province or Sun—some photographer there—took a picture. And I thought, oh shit, I don't want my mum and dad to see this, you know, like, I don't want to be harangued. So I got the Province and The Sun. I was safe, right? My mother phones me up and says, 'What the hell are you doing?' Because it showed up in the Kamloops paper. And she was proud of me. And so she actually sent that to my grandfather, who was in a home, a nursing home, in Prince Rupert. And he put it up on his bulletin board. Because

he had been a lifelong CCFer. Some of my cousins says that they believe CSIS has a file on him, so, yeah. And he actually became a lifetime member of the NDP as well.

GD [00:22:16] Right. Radical.

LWK [00:22:19] Yup.

GD [00:22:21] So let's see. Did your job change over time?

GD [00:22:29] It did, because I was the chairperson of the component and we didn't have any temporary representative staff reps up here, so they would ask activists to fill in. So I started to do that on a pretty regular basis, and eventually I made my way over to becoming a full-time staff rep in, I think it was '94. But most of the years before, I spent most of my time in the union office doing work and that.

GD [00:23:03] Right. Did things change after the NDP came in '91?

LWK [00:23:08] It sure did.

GD [00:23:10] How so?

LWK [00:23:11] Well, they implemented the Korbin Commission report.

GD [00:23:17] Right, Judi Korbin.

LWK [00:23:18] Yeah. So and that was interesting because, you know, they were calling us FTEs [full-time equivalents]—we weren't people. And there was no regulations on how many regulars you had to have. So some people had been auxiliaries for years and never received benefits. So, we'd negotiated that, but Korbin came along and met around and actually did a report saying that government needed to recognize more people. So that was helpful. And the other thing that we talked about is the staffing because ministry reorganized. And people that were actually doing the jobs wouldn't get it, because they would say now they needed a certificate or education. But then the person that they hired would come in and they would expect the person that had been doing the job to train them. And that, you know, like to us, it was a barrier. You know, if you want to have good public service, it doesn't always mean that you need to have a degree behind your name. I know lots of people that have lots of degrees that are dumber than hammers, you know, and I'm just being honest. And I have a friend who was actually re-org'd out of his job, I think, three times. And we would ask the questions like, why does a professional—why is a professional a professional? The PEA, the Professional Employees Association, why are they, you know, and they would say, well, they have a seal that they have to use. So we went out and surveyed how many times the seal had been used in our area. And I think it was once in a few years. So, you know, we knew that there was the barriers. And I still think there are barriers. They always said that they could never hire staff in smaller communities. And we always said, well, why don't you hire an auxiliary that works for all the ministries? Well, we can't do that because we're—

GD [00:25:47] Siloed.

LWK [00:25:49] Yes. So anyway, we put forward some really good ideas. And government and the bureaucracy—a lot of them, they didn't like. But I think the one about 1,827 hours in a year or 15-month period, you shall become an employee.

GD [00:26:13] Right. A regular.

LWK [00:26:16] Because then you can get the benefits.

GD [00:26:23] The staff rep job—did you have a specific area? It's talking to members. It's handling grievances. It's taking arbitration sometimes?

LWK [00:26:38] So I was responsible for Component 12, the administrative services; Component Six, which was social, education, like the social workers and probation officers and that. The liquor stores, I think. And I think Component 10. No, I think I had Component Three and Component Four, which were the— Component Three at that time was just community. Component Four was the health care services. So, that was my responsibility. But we were a two-person staff, two-woman staff. And that was another thing that when I got my job, there was quite a discussion amongst my male counterparts about why does Prince George have two female reps? We said, well we used to have, we've had two male reps, what's the difference? So, you know, there's always been kind of a push back on equality—.

GD [00:27:44] On women.

LWK [00:27:47] Yeah. So, we worked hand in hand because it's a two-person office, we're going to work together. And we worked and our front staff were awesome. Donna Sacuta worked. She was good. And then we got Dina Close, and she was awesome. So we all worked as a team because that's how you get work done. You know, if you have a huge mail-out to 1,000 people, why would you have one clerk do it when everybody could sit down, have a coffee and stuff a few envelopes, right?

GD [00:28:23] What was the overall relationship between the workers, employers and the union? And obviously it changed from the '80s to the '90s and then changed again after 2001. Can you talk a bit about that?

LWK [00:28:40] So, you know, relationships are hard sometimes. And my job was to make sure if someone was in trouble that the employer had performed their work, done their job, because, they would say to us, well, the union's going to protect them. And I said, well, who hired them? The union had no part in the hiring. What have you done to stop that behaviour or whatever? You know, we would work through that. And it worked pretty good here, I think. We didn't have—terminations were an automatic send to headquarters, but you had to do a thorough investigation, go down and look at all the personnel records and stuff like that. And if it was, you know— we did work with the headquarters staff to get, like how far will this one go or shall it go? But we tried to work the grievances out. And if we couldn't, we would have an arbitrator.

LWK [00:29:47] We used to have Allan Hope a lot up here. And he was great. He was really good. I can remember at one arbitration, my fellow was, the griever was a young person and he worked in uniform and he says, 'Well, what should I wear to come?' I said, 'Well, just make sure whatever you're wearing is clean.' He says, 'Do I need a suit?' And I says, 'No, just be presentable.' And so he came in wearing a shirt and blue jeans, and I was dressed like I needed to be dressed. And the employer was sitting across from us and he had a monogrammed shirt. So Allan Hope—he was a love actually, he was really good. He was sitting there and he could see that my griever was really kind of upset. So Allan starts it out and he says, 'I just want to explain a little bit about myself' and gave us his

history about Manitoba and working with the Canada Labour Board with the St. Lawrence Seaway Agreements. And he says, 'I've been all over. I've done all sorts of—I handle grievances.' He says, 'I have handled grievances out of the back of a pickup truck because the griever has to be heard. And sometimes, they need to be where they are.' So as he's saying that, you could see the employer took off his fancy jacket, folded it nicely, took out his cufflinks and rolled up his sleeves. And we won the grievance. But, you know, it was really good to hear an arbitrator actually give his background rather than just not being personable at all. So that was an eye opener for me that he was so kind with sharing his life. And he would tell the griever, 'When I was young, I was like you. And I thought to myself, I can't work with anybody. I have to work for myself. So I went back to school.'

GD [00:32:12] I worked with a lot of arbitrators, but Hope was a bit before my time. But the Hope Award, and I think it was about '86, brought the part-time faculty who weren't part of the union into the union at the college. And it was because they were doing the same work that the full time were doing, it's just the collective agreement didn't cover them until that.

LWK [00:32:37] And then of course, each of the divisions would say well budgetary, we've got this special amount for that, you know, so we could use and mistreat you any way we want because you're not really one of us. That used to drive me crazy.

GD [00:32:55] So did you get involved in negotiations?

LWK [00:32:59] Not really, because most of my groups were the provincial groups, right? I did. When I was assigned the health group, which was Component Four, they were heading up for a big strike. So I worked with them because that was part of my employee group. But we had a local group here and we had to set the essential services negotiations. And that was really interesting because we had essential—

GD [00:33:35] —what's essential?

LWK [00:33:35] Exactly. So, in the hospital, everybody, most of them didn't lose very much money. I don't know. I really didn't pay much attention. But our people, when they went out, they were out. And all they got was strike pay. But the employer, because they had their list of requirements, I think they had to work 60 hours a week or something before they could call somebody else in. But at one department, they wanted the Clerk Three to be essential. And at that point, the clerical workers were not even offered a decent wage increase. So at the negotiations table, I said, 'Well, I agree that that person's essential, but you don't pay them like they're an essential worker. So why is she important to you now but she's not important enough to be paid?' And the employer kind of spun around and did some stuff, and I said, 'No, you show me when you're working here, your required shifts, and come back and talk to me.' So I left, and one of the employers actually phoned me and said, I have never seen management jump like when you said that, because they realized, because they were important. You know, I can tell who can work and who can. And they didn't want to have to do the paperwork. Well, then pay us more. Get to the table. So that was interesting. So I did do that. I did—because some of our master agreements had local agreements too, so we would work with that.

GD [00:35:34] So what kind of issues did workers, that ended up in grievances, what did they—what sparked them?

LWK [00:35:44] A lot of it would be—like a lot of grievances you want to solve before they become grievances because they fester in the workplace. So you would have people that

would say, well, so-and-so is being treated better than I am. Okay. So we could deal with that.

GD [00:36:01] Favouritism?

LWK [00:36:02] You know, if they get an extra 15 minutes for lunch, have you ever asked for an extra 15 minutes? You know, there are solutions. But it would be discipline. You know where—I think most of them—it would be breaking of the rules. Like with corrections, it was you didn't do a full count or whatever because they have cameras and stuff. So that would be the sort of grievances we would deal with. When they were working on the forest fires, some of the crews at the start weren't getting their proper overtime, so we would work with that. Some of them, their conditions weren't good, so we were able to establish better conditions. But a lot of the stuff out in our field was gathering information for bigger tables. So the information would get funnelled.

GD [00:37:08] And then they would bargain the improvements for whatever that issue was.

LWK [00:37:12] Because in government, you couldn't negotiate something in an area without it, on your own, because you had to have—it was a provincial issue.

GD [00:37:22] So that master agreement grew over time?

LWK [00:37:24] Yeah.

GD [00:37:25] And now covers just about everything.

LWK [00:37:29] So, what I always cannot fathom or figure out why government privatized because it's still government money that's funding everything. But now they've added in another set of structures, you know. So I've never been able to understand why they would do that. And I think it was because they wanted to be able to say, we only have so many employees, to show they were fiscally responsible, but they weren't.

GD [00:37:57] No. And the GEU now has more non-government employees than it does government employees.

LWK [00:38:03] That's right. Because a lot of our work was contracted out, like payroll was contracted out, I think, to Telus something, first of all. But they did bring them back into government. So that was a large department. And it was hard when they would come in and close a whole department. Like they closed my department, land titles. They just closed it and moved everything to New West.

GD [00:38:36] So when did that happen?

LWK [00:38:39] It was under the Liberal government, Socred Liberals, Shirley Bond was in power.

GD [00:38:46] So the early 2000s.

LWK [00:38:50] So they closed it all. So that means that there's no land title office, the nearest one here for all of B.C. is Kamloops. So they've got Kamloops, New West and Victoria. So there's nothing north. And then they talk about no jobs in the north. Well, that's because you centralized them. So we kind of run around in circles on it. So that was kind

of a shocker. There was one woman had over 35 years of service and to be told she was redundant. That was hard.

GD [00:39:28] So those cuts came after the Liberals were elected in 2001. And the cutting red tape, rationalizing government, for us, it was Bills 27, 28 and 29. You talked about your office closure. But I remember standing on a stage with the heads of all of the local unions, and we figured there were about 2,000 jobs lost in Prince George alone in those first few years of the Liberals.

LWK [00:40:10] Yes.

GD [00:40:11] I remember having, you know, lists of 50 people that I was dealing with in terms of layoffs and bumping and what you're qualified for and that kind of stuff. And the same obviously happened in the government service as well.

LWK [00:40:25] Yeah. And some of the public sector had never been through layoffs, so they never figured they would ever be touched, you know, like we're too important. And they were touched and they were absolutely shocked. You know, I had one fellow tell me, 'Well, we're not worried.' I said, 'they're coming for you, too.' And when they did, I said 'I told you.' Because they thought, we're protected. You know, like we work with kids and we do this. Doesn't make a difference.

GD [00:41:01] So tell me how the Active Voice Coalition came to be.

GD [00:41:05] That was after all of these ugly bills. And we got together and thought that we needed to reach out to our community groups that were affected as well, some of the societies. And I'm just thinking, you know, I know Nathan Cullen was involved out in—

GD [00:41:28] —west of here.

LWK [00:41:29] —in Smithers and that. So, what we did, was anybody that had an interest, we invited to meetings because they were cutting environmental—

GD [00:41:43] Forestry, health, education. We had forums. Usually at the college. And we'd have speakers and people were invited in.

LWK [00:41:57] Yeah.

GD [00:41:58] Peter Ewart was one of the big drivers.

LWK [00:42:01] I was going to say, yeah, Peter.

GD [00:42:03] You and I were the signatories to whatever money that we were spending. And we got a really good turnout and I don't know how many forums we did, but there were probably eight or 10 or something over the couple of years.

LWK [00:42:19] Yeah. We did forums on forestry. We did just anything that was important—

GD [00:42:29] —and affected public services.

LWK [00:42:31] So you were part of the group, too, that when we put the signs all down the bypass. Oh yeah, we had a really good night.

GD [00:42:40] We did. Yeah.

LWK [00:42:41] Yeah. And the CUPE brothers and sisters just left the signs because they were too busy to take them down. So that worked out really, really good.

GD [00:42:51] And then that kind of morphed into the Stand Up for the North.

GD [00:42:55] Yeah.

GD [00:42:57] I wasn't so involved in that because by then I was probably down in Vancouver. But it continued on, as, you know, the cuts hit places like Mackenzie and it just kept going on.

LWK [00:43:11] We would bring up speakers and really good ones like from the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

GD [00:43:18] CCPA.

LWK [00:43:18] And we had Shirley Douglas actually come out to speak to us about health care forum.

GD [00:43:25] Did I emcee that event?

LWK [00:43:27] I think you did.

GD [00:43:28] It was up at the university.

LWK [00:43:31] And I got to pick her up.

GD [00:43:33] Oh cool.

LWK [00:43:33] And I actually used my air points to get her here because we didn't have very much money.

GD [00:43:39] No money, yeah right.

LWK [00:43:39] Yeah, it was really cool. And I think she inspired a lot of people. And you know, to talk about her father, who was the father of medicare. And at that point the most famous Canadian.

GD [00:43:56] Tommy Douglas. Yeah.

LWK [00:43:58] Yeah. I actually had an employer rep for government. I had a picture up on the wall of Tommy Douglas, and it says, What we desire for one, we desire for all, or whatever. And he said, Who is this Tommy Douglas? And I said, Kiefer Sutherland's father—grandfather. And he said, What? So he was absolutely amazed, you know.

GD [00:44:32] Then Kiefer, you know, brought back the Mouseland, Tommy Douglas story.

LWK [00:44:39] I think I have it. Still have a tape of that.

GD [00:44:41] I got it on my computer as well.

LWK [00:44:44] No, I actually have—Shirley gave me a tape. A VHS tape.

LWK [00:44:47] Cool.

LWK [00:44:48] Yeah. So I should probably give it to you guys to put in—like, who knows what's on file, right? So that was really good times. It could be very depressing. You know, I can remember one of our people was told he was gone, he's finished. And anyway, he had mental health issues anyway but he took his own life. And at Christmas—this is bad. We were bad. The MLAs here were all having open houses. So, BCGEU said, well, we're going to go around and visit all of these open houses and talk to the MLAs because they wouldn't talk to us. You know, like they didn't want to hear from people that were affected. So I went and I just actually said at one office, 'You and your government killed somebody.' And the answer was 'no.' I said, 'Yeah. You made him feel so bad, he took his own life.' 'Well, you know, that was legislation.' I said 'No. You and your government passed that legislation and somebody died.' And then I felt really bad afterwards. But the people that were with me said, 'No, you did the right thing.' You know, like, they have to know.

GD [00:46:18] There are consequences to what they did.

LWK [00:46:20] Yeah, we did marches down the street here. We had rallies and I can remember one group—I won't say who it was. Like when we had a march, we marched down the street. And there was one group that says, No, no, no. We gotta march on the sidewalks. I said, 'Fuck that. If we're going to march, we'll march and we're going to make it inconvenient for everybody.'

GD [00:46:45] Somebody was talking about, you know, got shit for not having a permit. I don't ever remember asking for a permit. We'd just take the street.

LWK [00:46:57] Yeah. Somebody said to me, Before you do that march, you need to get a permit. And I said, at that point, 'Fuck the permit.' You know, like, this is civil disobedience. I don't need this shit.

GD [00:47:08] Yet. I remember burning a copy of Bill 28 in front of Shirley Bond's office. And got a picture in the paper for that.

LWK [00:47:19] Then they did the cuts to child care and stuff like that, too. We did—they put me up on top of, I think, a truck or something. So I made the front page of the newspaper and I just hated that.

GD [00:47:33] There was a big rally by City Hall.

LWK [00:47:36] With Bill Vander Zalm. And that was the active voice group actually organized that.

GD [00:47:42] That was the B.C. Rail issue, was it not? And Sinclair was here with on the same stage as Vander Zalm.

LWK [00:47:50] Yeah, that was really kind of cool. That was a lot of work. We did leaflets about the minimum wage. We went out and got signatures outside the Cougars hockey game because the Cougars were doing very well and we actually got Devon—I'll think of his name. I could say it a minute ago. Anyway, his father signed the petition and he was from Alberta. He said, I can't believe that they have a training wage, you know.

GD [00:48:22] Yeah.

LWK [00:48:24] Devon—

GD [00:48:24] Six Bucks Sucks.

LWK [00:48:27] Setoguchi, something like that. So during the campaign we actually had some unidentified youngster that I know that actually—we did a joy ride with Joy MacPhail. We took her past all of the sites where there'd been cuts, like the schools that were closed and all of that. So they were going down the bypass and this young fellow jumped out with his Six Bucks Sucks sign. Pat Bell was not impressed. He said, 'Our people don't get paid that.' We checked. You know, there was a training wage, though, and he probably didn't give it to them long, but there was still the training wage. So that was—

GD [00:49:12] He had the Wendy's in town.

LWK [00:49:16] So we wrote letters to the MLAs, the three of them. There was Paul Nettleton, Shirley Bond and Pat Bell. And we had meetings with them and they said that they would get back to us. They never got back to us. Never. We had a meeting about forestry at Pat Bell's office, and I was talking about the forest office in McBride closing down. I think they left two staff, and the highways office was closed down. And there again goes a whole bunch of jobs from a community. And we went in and we were talking to Pat Bell and I said, Well, you know, you've taken away the pertinency from the lumber. And I said, You're killing the small towns. And he said, 'Well, Lorna, if we use your line of thought, then Penny and Giscome would still be viable communities. So I went like this [rising from her chair], and I think it was Wayne Mills grabbed me back because I was hearing this with, how dare you think so little of our communities to say that. And you look at McBride now, there's no grocery store—

GD [00:50:43] Fort Fraser—

LWK [00:50:44] And the Integris Credit Union has opened up there now. But for a long time—

GD [00:50:50] —no bank.

LWK [00:50:50] No bank. No grocery store. There was—they still had a health unit with, I think, a half-time clerk that might have worked eight hours a week or something. It was just—

GD [00:51:05] —people from all over the north would come into Costco to do their shopping.

LWK [00:51:08] Yeah. Yeah.

GD [00:51:10] But one of our meetings with Pat and Shirley after the colleges put forestry program on the block ended up with Pat, who was the minister of forests at the time, giving the program tenure, so chunks of land around the region so that they could self-fund and not be subject to the whims of the college in terms of the programing. That was a good thing. The only good thing that they did in the 17 years that they were in.

LWK [00:51:43] I just felt so bad because they didn't understand the impact it was having on people, the stress it was causing, the ill health. And it caused a lot of mental health issues. And I think that's probably— I think that was the start of—because mental health—there was no health care—like we had an EFAP [Employee and Family Assistance Services]. But that was a referral. And we didn't have the services in the north because they were being closed down. So, yeah, that was pretty tough.

GD [00:52:26] So how do you think the labour movement has changed over time?

LWK [00:52:35] I think there's been good and then there's been bad. I was reading a book. One of my friends has a book about the Crowsnest Pass and Frank and all of those mining communities, and I'm looking through it. And there's her grandmother and her, you know, her aunts and uncles and stuff like that. And so we start talking and her one uncle was very active with the trade union movement, with the miners union, and I saw how solid they were and then we moved. But it was basically, it was male dominated and the women were the auxiliaries, you know, like we were good for making lunches or stuff like that. So what the change has been, I think, is it's become more equal. But, you know, as gender-wise and equality-wise, like with wages—and I think labour made a big difference with pay equity, minority hires and things like that, we really did a good job of showing that everybody that has an ability to do that job should be hired for that job. And to me, that's what equity is. You know, so I think that made a big difference. But I think sometimes now the labour movement forgets that their creed is, 'What we desire for ourselves we wish for all.' You know, because it's not happening to the young kid, you know, works at a gas station or a low minimum wage job.

GD [00:54:30] Grant's Law, I remember was something that the labour movement pushed, to have two people in and cameras at gas stations and stuff like that. And then the Liberals gutted that when they came in.

LWK [00:54:42] Yeah. So all of the things that we had done, but it just seems like right now everybody's so busy fighting for their own group that they forget that there is a big group. And we need to be doing more in the outlying communities. George was talking about the rallies in Victoria and things like that. Well, those are really good. But that doesn't involve people outside of Vancouver and Victoria and everybody from up north would go down for these big rallies. And nothing would happen up here because nobody was around. So I think what we have to do is get closer together, work better, find more partners. And realize that not everybody has the benefits. I was active with the NDP as well. And I can remember at one council meeting, there had been a motion come up about charging these big gas guzzlers that people used to work in the forests and stuff like that. And, you know, and I just stood up and said, well, that's just not practical. You know, we can't send our people out to work when it's unsafe for them in a little car. And the response back from somebody from the Lower Mainland was, they'll have to get their unions to negotiate higher wages. And I says, Well, no, you have to realize that not everybody has the the joy or the ability to be unionised. So we have to be looking at people like that as well. I know a lot of body shops aren't unionised, but they get increases with ICBC and stuff like that. So, I just think that labour has to do a better job of, like Bob [Waghorn,

interviewed separately] said there, about saying what we've done. You know, we've brought you the weekend, we brought you the 40-hour and hopefully 35-hour work week, you know, brought you two days off.

GD [00:56:56] Dental care.

LWK [00:56:56] Yeah. And life insurance and WCB and, you know, health care. Because when the Liberals were in, or Socreds, or whoever the hell they are, I can't remember what they are today—

GD [00:57:13] They're Conservatives today. Rustad.

LWK [00:57:16] So, they made us pay for our own health care. So, and that was not in the plan either. But even while they made us pay, they didn't improve things. They were still cutting. You know, I look at Prince George. We funded for a lot of equipment. And we had to sign—get groups together to petition for the university. You know, it was a community—

GD [00:57:46] effort—

GD [00:57:46] We all worked together to say we need one. And we had to do that for just about everything we do. With health care, we have to fund for it or show an interest in it. Because there's always groups that—where there's more people, so they need it more than what we do. But people down in Vancouver don't have to travel eight hours to get to health care. You know, like, it might be a hardship, might take a couple of hours to get there. But it's on bus systems, it's there. So, you know, and I think we have to realize and start thinking not just of ourselves as trade unionists but as our community. You know, because without a healthy community we don't have anything. It doesn't matter what politics you are, you need a healthy community, business, the social groups, everybody has to work together to make sure we have jobs, health care, all sorts of programs for kids, for people with addictions, you know, like homeless people. I think that's our obligation as humans is to look out after those that aren't as fortunate as we are.

GD [00:59:11] Yeah. When I was down in Vancouver, they were putting up the modular, like two-storey homes, you know, for homeless and placing them all around the city. And I see they're starting to do that here now. Yeah, but the downtown is not what it was.

LWK [00:59:32] No. And I am the president of AWAC, which is the Association Advocating for Women and Community. When it started out, it was advocating for women and children because at that time there was no shelter that would accept somebody that was drunk. And there was no children's shelter. So that was that need. But as we see our needs and our services expanded, you know, because you know, we have our Olive's Branch—it's a safe spot for people have been through detox and then they can go to Olive's Branch and they work their way. It's up to two years they can stay there. So we've done all sorts of stuff like that. But we're also now realizing that you can't just have them finish one group and just say you're done. We've got to make sure that we've got supports for them to continue on. We've got to make sure that there's job training so people can go and feel good about who they are. So we've got lots of work that we can do as a community. I just think we just have to work harder together.

GD [01:00:55] So why does labour history matter to you?

LWK [01:01:05] It matters to me. My grandfather was a carpenter and a CCFer. And I don't know, he could have been a Communist. I don't know. I just knew him as my grandfather and he was a good guy. And he worked, the same reason like I believe. I was an NDPer before I was a union member because I believed in what they believe. I believe that if you're a farmer, you deserve to get good wages, too, like everybody is worth a living wage, some which way. And that's how he was with things. So, looking at it that way, I think, so— the question was, what changes are, what's the difference—

GD [01:01:57] What matters to you?

LWK [01:01:58] What matters to me is that we take the lessons from the past, like the Winnipeg strike. You know, we did a walkout in government to stop the provincial government from messing with our pension plan. You know, we walked off the job for that and we stopped it. You know, it's looking at an injustice and trying to make it right. You know, like with residential schools and things like that. I was fortunate because, you know, there was a treaty negotiation like a Northern RAC [Regional Advisory Committee] and TAC [Territorial Advisory Committee]. And I was appointed to the Northern Regional Advisory Committee. And you know, we had people from Teslin and, you know, we had guides and trappers and all sorts of people and, you know, to talk about negotiations and that was interesting because, well, we want the best for everybody. As a group, there was a lot of people in the group that thought if we gave First Nations the ability to govern their own land, that they should have a say over what they put on the land. You know, so there was quite a seesaw there because I think that it's no different than a municipality. If you're going to do that, they have the same rights as—

GD [01:03:37] Yeah.

LWK [01:03:37] You know, and then they say, Well, we're going to lose all our jobs. And then I'd say, Well, you know, how many social workers are there in town? How many lumberjacks are there available? You know, like, let's be sensible here. We've all got to learn to work together. So, I see the labour movement has to get back to talking about being together and thinking about others. You know, like, we've got seniors—right now, there's a cry for seniors' housing. Yes, I agree, labour has to look after their own, but they have to realize that they're going to be one of them, too. So you can't just look after people for 20 or 30 years of their life. You got to expand it.

GD [01:04:29] And some people are living longer than they worked. Retire at 65, lived at—my dad's 99. He retired in '88.

LWK [01:04:40] He's probably earned more in pension than the time—well, not earned more, but he's been on pension longer than he worked. My father was the same.

GD [01:04:51] But his benefits are frozen at the '88 level.

LWK [01:04:55] Dad was lucky. I'm thankful for our pension plan—

GD [01:04:58] It wasn't a government job. It was at Bell Canada.

GD [01:05:03] He's lucky he's even got to keep his pension. With the federal government—you know, that's a sad affair too. Like why don't we allow people to put into Canada Pension as a pension plan. You know, people go out and the employer thinks they're very kind by giving them RRSPs ever year. But most people can't afford to not cash

the RRSP. So it's really not a savings. So if they had to put it into Canada Pension, then it could be indexed. So, we've got lots of work to do. But I think what we have to do is, we have—as a former real activist within labour, I think people have to realize, like I think they count on the retirees to do too much in the community and they don't have the energy. Some of them, you know, are not as healthy as what they were. So I think there has to be—they have to look at who we are and not just focus on Vancouver and Victoria. You know what is it, the Area [code] 250. It's not that anymore but yeah, that was the old saying, you know. Anything north of Hope, there is no hope, right?

GD [01:06:36] No.

LWK [01:06:37] I remember the first time I realized what political action was. We had an employer that was just, just terrible. And I was a young activist and we were at a meeting and we were talking about, well, how can we do this? And they had an elected board. So somebody came up with the idea, why don't we go and overtake the board? So we had everybody lined up, you know, who the table officers were going to be. And we went in and we voted and we won. And to me, that was the first political action sign that I ever saw. And I would try to explain that to people because we don't talk about what political action is. It's not about—

GD [01:07:28] What, marching up and down the street.

LWK [01:07:30] And it's not about the NDP, Conservatives or any—It's about community. How do we make our community better. And it is all politics because you have to keep talking to people.

GD [01:07:45] Well, I want to thank you for coming in today.

LWK [01:07:48] Thank you for having me.

GD [01:07:49] It's been a great conversation.

LWK [01:07:52] Lots of memories, hey. Oh my God.