Interview: Bob Waghorn (BW)
Interviewer: George Davison (GD)
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Transcription: Jane Player

Also heard: Lorna Waghorn-Kidd (LWK), Natasha Fairweather (NF)

GD [00:00:05] Thanks, Bob, for coming in. Just by way of introduction, I'm George Davison. I'm the interviewer of record today. We're doing this for the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre, and I want to start by saying that we're on the unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, who have lived here for thousands of years.

BW [00:00:26] It should be mentioned.

GD [00:00:26] Yes. So, I have a series of questions for you. Biographical questions like, you know, your name and where you grew up. Some questions about your working life. Some questions about politics at work. There's lots of that. Then some more general questions at the end about labour issues then and now. So, we'll start off by just asking you your full name.

BW [00:00:50] Okay. I'm Robert John Waghorn, and I was born on [...], in 1946.

GD [00:00:57] Well, happy birthday.

BW [00:00:59] (laughter) Yeah, it just passed.

GD [00:01:00] Just past. Yeah. Where did you grow up?

BW [00:01:03] North Vancouver—227 East 10th Street, actually, in an old house that we—my dad ended up being in because—just finished building a new house and was all ready, we just moved in, and the contractor skipped town and never paid the mortgage stuff. So, that was that. We had to get another, buy another house. So, we bought this old place on 12th Street. Three story house, I remember, and I had a—I had a—my rooster, my room was right up in the very top in an attic window. So, I had the whole floor kind of thing, but it was big enough for one great big room. So, I was a lucky kid with having a big room I grew up in.

GD [00:01:46] Up the hill? View of the harbour?

BW [00:01:48] Yes, exactly because 10th Street actually came—North Vancouver was originally called Moodyville—

GD [00:01:53] Yes.

BW [00:01:53] And I lived at Second, and Moody was Second and Saint An—it was a block away from Moody Street, which was a vertical routing street. They did all of them as far as—there was St Andrew's, St George's, and stuff like this. Lonsdale would—and both Lonsdale being the centre of the town was either—your address was either east or west. Now as of Lonsdale it's the main run—it runs all the way down with the big ship park. The

ferry terminals came in and I can remember as a kid riding those ferries and going to dollar 49 day with my mum from—

GD [00:02:30] Woodward's.

BW [00:02:30] At Woodward's from my mom on the ferry. We'd go over on the ferry. We never missed a shoe sale. (laughter) I expected before they were great. Old Cohen run the—my dad knew him—old Cohen was the guy that ran Army & Navy, started Army & Navy stores. Down there, they were a big thing because, I mean, there was like just bins and bins of shoes, and they were all like dirt cheap because they'd buy all these stuff other companies would sell off their last ends and stuff in bulk. These guys bought it, sold it. You know, I even bought a suit there once. (laughter)

GD [00:03:09] What did your dad and mum do?

BW [00:03:11] My dad was a milkman. Started early in the morning. I think the different dairies he worked for some were early and some were a little bit later. I can remember early one o'clock. If my father was late, maybe eight, or pardon me, seven, so he'd leave at six.

LWK [00:03:31] So, he had actually had a horse and buggy.

BW [00:03:34] Yeah. He was the last milkman to go off the streets of Vancouver with a milk horse. He used to—I used to love going with him when I was a kid because of the horses, eh, and so he let me drive. He taught me how to drive a wagon, but I never drove a team. But he did, and he was an original teamster. He actually did drive teams of horses. When he drove industrial milk it was very heavy, very heavy wagons. So, they needed a team. They weren't Clydesdales; they were always smaller. But it they were still—to me they were really big horses, but they weren't full draft horses. Like, they weren't it—

GD [00:04:17] Right.

BW [00:04:18] The strength wasn't needed. That was another thing I liked about it—

GD [00:04:21] —Didn't need them for the hills in North Van?

BW [00:04:22] Was the barn. When the day was over, you go in, you go back to the dairy, you unload everything and all the milk product stuff, everything so it'd be just a truck full of basically nothing. That would be— sometimes you'd have one or so roll of—a carton of stuff that you wanted. So, they went from the Berry Dairy, and then the horses mostly drove themselves. You hardly ever had to do anything. The horse would come out from the dairy, watch for the traffic and cross the traffic, and find his way over into an open spot. And you never worried about red lights or—you never had to really watch the road much because the horse knew when the light was green. The horse knew when a light was red, and they would approach. They never were going that fast (laughter), but they know—right. You know, they knew the consistency of the lights, what the—what was happening next. They knew when the light changed from green to red; they'd start going. And my dad, most of the time he'd have a—he'd have his big book, milkman's book, and he had a page for every customer. So, it was about this thick and it opened with big ring binders with, you'd change—and that was their accounts, so how much they owed everybody and whatever. All he would do is he'd just sort of going through his book like this, as they ride,

go through Hastings and Boundary right up to, see they were going up to Vancouver Heights, I think they called that part of—and then it switched into the Burnaby part.

GD [00:06:02] So autonomous driving, autonomous driving.

BW [00:06:05] I used to love going with him because I could stand in behind horses, and all I did was [makes a click, click sound]. I mostly—and it didn't matter if I was there or not. It was just fun for me because my dad would load up two carriers, and he knew all the holes in the fences and stuff like that. Back then almost everyone bought milk from the milkman because he was there every day before you got up. And that's why I didn't bother with, like, in the morning, you weren't going to phone up a C-O-D car—you didn't have a phone to start with. You weren't going to go and knock on their door to wake them up for them to collect.

GD [00:06:43] Yeah.

BW [00:06:43] Even if it was B-O-B, which meant bottle out, you know. Bottle out whatever, B-O, whatever, that's what—they put a bottle in certain place, 'I want milk today.' The rest of the time they wouldn't bother, but they were still on there, and the horse knew that too. So, my dad, he'd load it up, and he'd go all the way down one side of the alley, and the horse would go up, and he'd know how much he had, and then he'd come back. He'd have like the carriers, so he could do two or three houses, and the horse would follow along, and they'd—not too far because he did the other side of the alley was an address on either Ninth Street, 10th—could be the Ninth-Tenth alley, or 11th, 12th, 12th, 13th, whatever. There is no 13th, right? Yeah, there is, but they're—every—they all have backyard alleys. So, it was very good for—very fast for the milk deliveries—bread guys and stuff. That's why they made them originally, and they worked very good.

GD [00:07:46] So, how long did the horse dairy last? Into the '50s?

BW [00:07:51] Oh, yeah. It went on and on, and it kind of—I think they, whatever left or whatever was left near the end kind of amalgamated because we can sell your horses and wagons off when you're selling your dairy because they were all taken over by bigger firms like Dairyland and Jersey Farms. The big producers gradually swallowed up the little guys, and they went to trucks.

GD [00:08:18] So, did your dad move to truck delivery?

BW [00:08:21] Yeah, he had to because then—well there wasn't enough value in keeping the horses anymore because you had to have—they were expensive to keep compared to trucks because you had to have a barn for them. You had to have feed for him. You had to have the groomers to make sure those horses were ready to go in the morning. So, it become one of those things. It was just—our society ate it up, so it's gone, and trucks were so much easier and faster, actually, in the way that they can get around faster, but the stand up drive thing they never like—they had a stand up drive thing and a seat was hardly—you only pulled out when you're going to go back to the carrier, you know, you're going to go someplace where, you know, you'd rather sit than drive.

GD [00:09:13] Yeah.

BW [00:09:14] It's easier to drive, actually sitting there, or standing because you have to have, you know, you had a hand clutch. You had—and your throttle and stuff. So, that's

when I learned. I had to know how drive one of those things but—way before I got a driver's license because he let me. He do the—he played the part—I played the horse part sometimes (laughter).

GD [00:09:33] Yeah.

BW [00:09:35] He'd get his route done pretty quick. So, I liked doing—I liked going with him and he liked taking me.

GD [00:09:40] So, that was your first experience with labour?

BW [00:09:42] Yeah.

GD [00:09:43] But it wasn't unionized?

BW [00:09:45] Oh, it was.

GD [00:09:47] Oh, it was?

BW [00:09:47] Oh, yes. My dad was like I said, a Teamster. .

GD [00:09:50] A Teamster.

BW [00:09:50] I meant that; I didn't just mean like a—as a profession.

GD [00:09:53] A job. Yeah.

BW [00:09:54] He actually drove a team and he—most of his working life drove a single horse milk wagon.

GD [00:10:04] Yeah.

BW [00:10:06] And yes, they were Local 31.

GD [00:10:09] Okay. So, the last—

BW [00:10:13] I was also taught like—always try and get a union job, Bob, because it's—you're going to make more money, and you're going to have benefits. This isn't the biggest thing—I can remember him always telling me that. He says, 'Go for the benefits.' He says, 'The bucks are short, all the bucks are always short, but benefits are killers.'

GD [00:10:34] Right.

BW [00:10:35] Actually, tell you something about my whole family, except for myself. I was the only one that was spared this. When they became about 20 years old, my dad took—had teeth problems and how, that had never been attended to because dentists were kind of a thing that the average working I couldn't afford. So, this was the era of false teeth coming in that it was cheaper to have false teeth than it was to be able to maintain your own teeth. So, I had two sisters, my mum, my dad, two sisters, and all had their teeth removed the time they were young, too young. Far too young. I was the only one that was spared to have my own teeth, which I still have, and they're not in bad shape either. So, you know, I've maintained them, and it's been expensive over the years.

GD [00:11:36] Yeah.

BW [00:11:37] That's with my own—my memory would kick in and, you know, find a job with the benefits. So, I went—I never had any of those benefits, and the Teamsters didn't supply any of that sort of stuff. Anyway, your jobs, we all, you know, you got all your jobs through the hall, usually called you. The Teamsters hall would call you. Or, if you found a job with—that was already unionized, and you weren't union, you didn't get hired unless the hall couldn't supply drivers. Same as the longshoremen's, longshoremen was big on that. I did some longshoring when I was 18, 20, and it took you a long time to get into the union. You didn't just go down, and if—once you got in the union, you got all the better jobs that were—they weren't—and they worked all the way through the line on seniority, all the way up from sitting on your ass to that because everything was so different back then because all the ships were unloaded manually, and everything came over the side in nets.

BW [00:12:44] I used to love to get on what we'd call—I went out—worked for BC Pony Express. It was unionized Teamsters, and we were contracted to the post office. I used to love to have what was called or get onto something that was called a foreign boat. We used to just refer to them as to foreign boats. You'd come back to the Pony Office and get one of these great big old tandems that had no power steering. It was built in the thirties. Stuff like this. I'll tell you why. You don't know, but it used to be back then truck drivers had good arm muscles. They were all like this. That's because they did this all day [makes a half circle twisting his arms] and they were heavy. I remember the first time I did that I was about—I don't know, I was a young kid, but I'll tell you, first thing, (laughter) I think I knocked the ash tray out of the truck trying to get a leg up to get some leverage to go like this [twists upper body] to actually start this (laughter) tandem from moving it some place on Seymour. Seymour and Granville. Like making a turn, you know, like you really had to kind of let the clutch out and really have the power, which I didn't have at that time. I put on here, but I managed, you know. So, you drove these things slowly because they had multiple gearboxes. They didn't have just multiple gears. You had—you go through one set of gearbox, and move you up to another gearbox, and then another gearbox to these two shift transmission. They are two stick transmission. One moved the gearbox and the other moved the gears. And they were fun to drive—not really—they were pretty—they could be. (laughter) If you got them tangled up and stuff like that, you started all over. (laughter) They were hell.

GD [00:14:35] So, was that your first paid job as a union member?

BW [00:14:38] Yeah. I was going to Vancouver Vocational Institute at the time, and I was taking mechanics. I had a cousin that worked for B.C. Pony Express, and she introduced me to Eric, who is the boss, and they hired me up. Because it was a 24 hour operation—

GD [00:15:06] Yeah.

BW [00:15:06] So, and everything was—we did everything in military time. The post office uses military time—12 or 24 hour time—so there was always something going on.

GD [00:15:20] So, this is probably the mid sixties?

BW [00:15:23] Yeah, exactly. That would have been—I'd say '67, '68 was when I went through vocational college, and I started with them.

GD [00:15:35] So, did you finish the mechanics course?

BW [00:15:38] Yeah, yeah, I did all that stuff, and then afterwards, I still worked for Pony on Saturdays. Because and I sometimes worked for them because they were unionized, so you had good bucks. The worst part of the whole unionized part was that we were under the federal labour contract because mail is, so we didn't have the same rules as, say, the Teamsters did in working for, say, Johnston Terminals or one of those big trucking outfits back then.

GD [00:16:12] So, what was the difference?

BW [00:16:14] Well, the difference was the labour codes were different.

GD [00:16:16] Okay.

BW [00:16:17] You had far more entitlements under provincial labour codes than you did, for example—I'll give you an example—overtime. Overtime was—on provincial labour code is calculated daily. However, in federal labour, time is calculated as anything over 1,340 hours in a month. So, that's how, the feds—that was—they arranged that purposely because when you started looking like you're getting pretty close to overtime, then it was—all that was kind of stopped so that you'd end up—they'd try and absorb it wherever they could, so they didn't really have to pay out in overtime. So, you wouldn't get time and a half. You'd get, right, you'd get so many hours up until you got 1,320 hours, then you could add overtime. But it was just kind of the way they did it. The feds did it and the provinces did it and the feds. It was just totally unfair, but they had all the power, so. You know, the only way of changing that is—

GD [00:17:21] Negotiate.

BW [00:17:22] Change government.

GD [00:17:23] Or change the government. Yeah. How long did you drive the truck from where did you go from there?

BW [00:17:30] Okay. Where was I last?

GD [00:17:31] Well, probably mid to late sixties. You were—

BW [00:17:34] Okay. Yeah, so—

GD [00:17:34] You were trying to turn the truck at Georgia and Seymour in downtown Vancouver.

BW [00:17:40] So, then I went and upgraded my license, and I decided to come up here—up to Prince George because, mainly because, my old best buddy worked on the railroad for most of his life and worked for—he came up here.

GD [00:17:57] For B.C.R.?

BW [00:17:58] I came up to the—for the old P.G. and E.—.

GD [00:18:01] Oh, okay.

BW [00:18:01] The Prince George Eastern.

GD [00:18:03] The Pacific Great Eastern Railway.

BW [00:18:06] Exactly.

GD [00:18:07] Prince George Eventually.

BW [00:18:08] Yeah. Right. (laughter)

GD [00:18:10] It started in 1914.

BW [00:18:10] Pigs Go East.

GD [00:18:11] Got here in 1952.

BW [00:18:13] There were all kinds of—(laughter). It had all kinds of nicknames. Yeah, but it was the same old railway that ran for—well, it was around when I grew up, and it was, and until—jeez, I can't remember—the one who shut it was Gordon Campbell. Closed it down. Pulled the tracks.

GD [00:18:31] Oh, yeah. They sold them off to the CN [Canadian National Railway]. Yeah. Thousand year lease or something.

BW [00:18:36] Yeah, it was—he was just all intentioned. It was a political move to help the lobby from trucking agency.

GD [00:18:42] You worked for the P.G.E.?

BW [00:18:42] To help the lobby from trucking agency.

GD [00:18:44] You worked for the P.G.E.?

BW [00:18:47] No. I never actually—

GD [00:18:48] But you came up to Prince George?

BW [00:18:50] I came up here at that time because I came up for a visit. Things were booming. This was in 1974.

GD [00:18:58] All right. So, tell me about Prince George in 1974.

BW [00:19:00] This is when I moved to Prince George. I came in '74, and I got one job one day. I didn't like it too much, quit, and got another. Then I—jobs were just like—if you didn't like one, you could hire in the morning and quit in the afternoon.

GD [00:19:18] So, what kind of work did you last a day in?

BW [00:19:20] Driving trucks.

GD [00:19:21] Driving trucks. Okay.

BW [00:19:22] I knew a little bit about equipment, but not very much, and so I start working for the city, the City of Prince George in 1974, actually, yeah—

GD [00:19:34] Okay.

GD [00:19:34] I can remember my seniority date was '74, and I loved it, actually, because it was just a good job. I really liked the people. These were just people like I was. I got along with these people. They were all working class people. The bar place had 27 bars when I came here. There was 27 pubs in Prince George. I used to hang out—I used to hang out in the Canada and the Mac and—

GD [00:20:13] The old hotels.

BW [00:20:14] Another good one. It was up on a—half a block away. Was almo— there was a pub on every corner.

GD [00:20:18] Yeah.

BW [00:20:19] Pretty well, or downtown.

GD [00:20:20] So, what made the Canada Hotel or the Mac, you know, what made those hotels your bars of choice?

BW [00:20:27] Friends were—actually, it was mostly because of this one friend, and he was a rail roader. So, it was the Canada or the National, you know. A lot of it was dependent on which railway too. Canada—and the Canada Hotel to P.G.E. guys and right across the National Hotel, with all the C and N guys, would head in there.

GD [00:20:49] Right.

BW [00:20:50] All rail was the single light but they were all different for different—and, yeah, actually were quite different because they're whole working terms.

GD [00:20:59] Yeah.

BW [00:21:00] The guys worked for C.N., and the feds were always jealous of the guys that work for P.G.E. because they got their benefits now. They didn't have to wait this bullshit with the 13 hour—

GD [00:21:12] Right.

BW [00:21:13] They didn't—where they never really got it as much or very little of it. Yeah. So.

GD [00:21:18] So, what kind of work did you do for the city?

BW [00:21:20] First day I started out driving a chain tandem garbage truck. It was—had eight hours previous on it, which was they fired it up for the night shift, so it was like a brand new truck. I had two guys where all I did is—I didn't have any idea what I was supposed to do, but I had two guys that were just—that were with me—that were just so much fun to work. You know, they just teach me the route as I went along because they—I

was picking up containers. So, these two guys, what they did is they moved the containers around—I would—and set it up, and then I would back up, and I'd hit the knuckles, what they call the knuckles, on the container that they left them by. And it's something—they're this wide on each side—and I used to nail them all the time because that's the first time I remember, like Paddy says, he says, 'You're the first real truck driver we've had.' He says, 'You know, I've been doing this. People are going to go for coffee now.' But he says, 'You're the only one who hits the knuckles bang on'. I says, 'Yes, because you know how to back me up.' (laughter).

BW [00:22:25] So, like we were interesting friends, and all of us, and the three of us got on really well. I mean, that's what made the job really kind of fun, and so I did like that. And I was—then I was sort of transferred around as what was needed because I didn't have any senioritas. I had no seniority at all. You know, I was hired on as a truck driver. You had three months probation, but it didn't give you, necessarily, unless it happened to be wide open and had already been through the bulletin board where all the jobs were pasted and if they couldn't fill up from outside the advertising, right. So, as I came down that day they hired—at that time, they would hire anybody that had an air ticket because the—they weren't, they were, now they were—there was—get previous first air tickets you had to buy were, err you had to get were a longer written exam for the—because it went into far deeper, and it was also for working out in the bush where you have so much air power equipment, and you—so you have to kind of know a little bit about how air systems work. The whole basic idea. You know, that there's pressure lines and then it hits a pot which activates something. Yeah, that's the basic thing. And you had to learn all about air brakes and back then, you had in the exam was disabling parts and stuff like this. For the old industrial thing, it covered everything from caterpillars, tractors to, you know, from heavy equipment to heavy trucks.

GD [00:24:27] So, Prince George mid-seventies, what's its population 30, 40,000, something like that?

BW [00:24:33] Or less, yeah, but it's growing like crazy because people were coming. There was lots of work. There was a thing here, like if you didn't like a job quit, get another one tomorrow morning, you know, they were just that available. Everybody was looking for people that could do whatever they needed. So, anybody with any—all the—a lot of trades people make more money up here and more work available and more overtime and stuff and they would go out of town from Vancouver or Kelowna or wherever. The union there would dispatch them up here and they'd go to work, and if they didn't have a union they wouldn't have just been dispatched here.

GD [00:25:14] Yeah. We were talking yesterday with Lois Boone, who started out as a teacher, and they were hiring teachers off the street. Qualified, unqualified because they needed bodies in the classroom.

BW [00:25:25] When I was the president of the Northern Area District Council of CUPE, Lois and Jim Fulton, they were our buddies. Lois was sort of in the east end, and our territory went at that time, right, from Rupert but it was all serviced only out of one servicing office from Prince George until we got the school board, then they—Ray said, 'You guys got the school board, you get another office.'

GD [00:25:59] So that's the employees, the support staff in the—

BW [00:26:04] We unionized a great amount of school board employees, and were able to put them in another, you know, it's like get into their own local. It was all self-related because there's a section of CUPE that delivers services that are different from municipalities than to a school board. Once the school board became organized, that's when we opened the office in Terrace. We had one in Prince George then—and give credit to the rep Jim Lamb, who was—Jim Lamb was the rep in Prince George or the rep for the North, and which went from Prince George and Rupert. I can't remember, but everything on top of the north but depending we're going to go as far as you had certs [certifications], I think we had something going on in McBride. These guys, they were traveling a lot because you had—our grievance procedures in the public sector are different than in the private sector. And the reasoning in the public sector is you're dealing with city councils as your as your last step before arbitration. So, we became very politically active once we started, like guys like myself who were on the provincial executive started realizing we need a campaign to elect our own bosses. In other words, these guys are out in off the street, and they want our vote, right?

GD [00:27:51] Yes.

BW [00:27:52] So, what we would do is we would entertain them all through the Prince George's District Labour Council. At that time, I think Ed Bodner was president. He became a council member.

GD [00:28:03] Yeah, because you guys elected him.

BW [00:28:05] Yes. Exactly. So, that would give us a voice on city council. And it was so important because in facts of reality, the city council never really knew what was going on with an awful lot of what was happening because management was going to tell them a story that they wanted them to hear.

GD [00:28:23] I don't think it's changed much.

BW [00:28:24] And having somebody else on council, that can ask these—we would feed them information on how these guys screwed up so bad on their contracts and stuff like that. So, we had somebody in city council now could speak for us and say, 'Well, why was this contracted out in the first place when it cost twice as much to contract it out with service that we previously did before at something like 75% of the cost. Why is this contracted out?' Well, seems to me like the only reason it's contracted out is because there's 25% of profit somebody could make off of them, right? So, you know, people in business, this is where your city council comes from. It's out in the street, out in the society. So, they got elected by whoever they backed, right? Whoever was going to put money to their campaign. We did exactly the same thing. We started to put money into sponsoring and helping guys like Bodner out. He worked in the brewery. He was a—he worked in Pacific Western Breweries and after he was a—after his labour involvement.

GD [00:29:42] Okay.

GD [00:29:43] After some time, I think, on city council, he didn't go there. He was—basically, when the first time I ever saw Ed Bodner he was president of the Prince George District Labour Council. The time I would have started going would most likely been about '75.

GD [00:30:02] So, tell me, CUPE 399 was the outside workers in the city?

BW [00:30:08] The inside—the outside—outside, 399, and 1048 were the inside workers.

GD [00:30:12] Okay.

BW [00:30:14] We bargained together. We sat at the same table.

GD [00:30:19] So, how did you get from driving a truck, a garbage truck to, you know, bargaining?

BW [00:30:25] My elected—my people I work with elected me.

GD [00:30:29] Okay.

BW [00:30:29] We elected our bargaining committee and except everything was done under a more professionally by a representative who had more training and was a trained negotiator. I can remember Chester Jefferies, who was a city manager for many, many years here saying this, 'But we have to negotiate against professional negotiators.' And I said to Chester, 'Isn't that your God damn job. You know, you're city manager. Who else is supposed to do it for you?' Well, as it works out, that's what happened. Other people started, and they started the accreditation, employers' accreditation association. The Mainline something—Okanagan Mainline Council—they called themselves and what they did down there instead of—the way we did, CUPE did bargaining and things was what we leapfrogged. We would establish one community and go, 'Well, they have it in Vernon, you know, right next door.' 'Oh, okay,' so you got it that way. (laughter) So, we leapfrogged a lot of stuff, and they realized they that, of course, so what they did is the employers signed over all their bargaining rights to this council.

GD [00:31:44] Right.

BW [00:31:44] Resulted in the longest strike that I can ever remember CUPE having, and the rest of this—what we did is we said, 'Okay, on this one, we're going to take this one and take this council on it because we could see this happen all over the place. We wouldn't be bargaining—

GD [00:32:03] So, what community was picked? Which city was picked for that strike?

BW [00:32:10] Well, this was the first strike that was in Kelowna. So, what we did is we took all of those employees off the job on strike, but we increased their strike pay to normal working pay, so that they were able, they were able to strike. So, I remember the provincial officer getting this motion through was hard because all of a sudden every local MPs in the province was divvying up as an assessment.

GD [00:32:43] Yeah.

BW [00:32:43] They were divvying it up not, and they didn't realize very long after they realized, well, this is expensive, but this is worth it because these people have now the right to go and fight without being strangulated financially, and which, you know, that's what employers just counted on. People running out of money and giving in. So, this way we won, and eventually the employers all ditched this council because it was costing, you know, this negotiation cost them far more in the long run than it did if they had just negotiated with all of us. We have what we call in CUPE, what we call the standard

agreement. No contract is ever signed that doesn't have everything in the standard agreement. It starts off by things like, simple as defining what work hours are, and all this sort of stuff, and the definitions that will appear all the way through. So, all of this has to be in every—we won't sign a contract that's not part of our standard agreement. You just—well, you could negotiate with small towns, and they'd say, 'No, this is it.' 'Well, do they pay that in whatever?' 'Yeah, you bet.' 'Because we don't sign a contract with you unless you agree to certain things'. You agree that, you know, that discrimination policies, and the sort of things that were made it easy enough so you could treat each other on fair basis. I always considered myself that being my history or whatever, often was tried to be bullied by personnel officers. And I'd say, 'You can sit right back down. Don't ever stand up and point your finger at me. Sit down.' I says, 'Now, I'll ask you to move this grievance to the next level of the grievance procedure. Thank you very much.'

GD [00:34:39] I was just showing Natasha this morning one of the ads in the Citizen from 1978 where the Labour Council is endorsing candidates.

BW [00:34:48] Who are they?

GD [00:34:49] That's Earl Mattingly, Stan Massey on council, and Frank Logan, school trustee. So, this is—

BW [00:34:58] Yeah, well, we would have it on our union meeting. We'd discuss who was running for council.

GD [00:35:05] Yeah.

BW [00:35:05] And of course, some people wanting to run for council wanted to talk to us before—

GD [00:35:11] Yeah.

BW [00:35:12] You know, to say that we would love your support, and that we support whatever they say. We support, or something like, or like the IWA, which I got this contract here today from the Workers of the World. Organize and unite.

GD [00:35:28] That's going back. That's going back a while.

BW [00:35:30] This is going back again. The period that it covers is from—this was my Uncle Felix. This was his—one here, I just looking through stuff I found and it—'adopted January 19th, amended July 1919.' So, it was a yearly, these things were both contracts at that particular time. This was a one year agreement.

GD [00:35:54] Yeah.

BW [00:35:55] So, and they did that to avoid strikes and stuff. The way that they did short contracts. So, yeah, so I was quite proud when I started looking at the date and remembering back. These are the constitution and laws of the O-B-U

GD [00:36:14] One big union.

BW [00:36:17] One Big Union.

GD [00:36:17] Yeah. Wow.

BW [00:36:17] So, I want to donate this to you guys—

GD [00:36:23] Oh, wonderful.

BW [00:36:23] It's for your stuff and because it's no good sittin' in one of my drawers somewhere. So, I'll give you that.

GD [00:36:30] Thank you.

BW [00:36:33] That's an accurate record of what was going on in 1919.

GD [00:36:38] Yeah. Just before the Winnipeg General Strike, and then sympathy strikes all over, including here.

BW [00:36:43] You bet. And how about the importance of crossing the picket line was because if you didn't have that kind of support, your—everybody, everything would break. It was so important. For example, I as a city worker pull out and there's government employed workers are outside here. I was supposed to pull out and back my truck up to a certain spot and empty all the cans. Picket lines were there. I just give them the ole thumbs up and we went on by. (laughter)

GD [00:37:16] We've covered a lot of ground. So, obviously you got more involved in the union, like you were on the negotiating committee, and then more involvement on the provincial scene?

BW [00:37:28] Well, I was more—I guess I was kind of involved more in the provincial scene, but all my training was national. Like when I—it was all done by CUPE Education department, which I did become a part of later. What they did was they would go around, and they did all the shop stewards' courses all the time for unions were always, you know, to teach people what their duties were as a shop steward. How to file a grievance and up to a certain point, right. That would be just the basic steward's level. Then we would go from there to do an advanced steward's level, and it would be taking it on to arbitration, whatever. Normally, the standard, a basic steward's course was a two-day event, usually held on a weekend. A day and a half, kind of like, and then the other courses, I was—became part of a group. It was an experimental endeavor from the National Union, and that was to train what they called a group of occasional instructors, which were union members. The whole purpose so that we could have more people giving instructions to other locals. So, people wanted to apply for this program, you applied for it. I did. Then the first thing I did was—I was sent off to school. I took a week-long course on how to do a two-day course. And we—the way that they did this worked very well to get people into a classroom environment, into a teaching environment, rather than a working environment—we buddied up. So, there would be all—we always sent two guys out. So, for Smithers, I had a partner, and we'd hook up in Smithers. We all knew each other well, and we all had exactly the same book, word for word. So, our note plans for the course were right there. If one person sort of stambled up or was looking for a place, it was a really good opportunity the next person would say, 'Well, [unclear]' eveything'd kind of get settled back into there. So, you'd always have somebody help you with your courses, which we found was really good because people weren't used to doing it. We found after they had a half a dozen of them as pairs, and they were quite, and able to do it all, the whole thing by themselves, which sort of doubles your amount of people.

GD [00:40:13] Sure. We used to call it train-the-trainer.

BW [00:40:15] Yeah, exactly what we did too. Yeah, it was.

GD [00:40:18] Did somebody come from National here to do the weeklong course, or did you have to go—did you go to Ottawa or—

BW [00:40:25] Yeah, I went to different places where they were held. Some of them were in Ottawa, and my specialty and the things turned out to be health and safety. So, I was on the National Health and Safety Committee, and I was a vice-president on the provincial committee and that made me the representative health representative or person for provincially. I would attend conferences from whatever, get all kinds of different information. It was—we were able to spread each other's, copy each other's, spread it around. For example, I was the one that really kind of found that municipalities and places where we don't have lay offs get rebates from the UIC [Employment Insurance Commission]. Of course, they never were telling us about this but what the rebates and the rebate was for because they tended to lay people off less, so they got this kind of a kickback from the UI.

GD [00:41:35] Okay.

BW [00:41:35] And yeah, so anyway, what—it could only be spent on benefits or whatever. It couldn't go back into wages. So, that's when the idea I've seen from being on other conventions and so on, and health and safety was this was an opportunity—

GD [00:42:01] To improve benefits.

BW [00:42:02] Yeah. For us to—the sick—what the employer was getting money back, didn't know what to do with it.

GD [00:42:08] Right.

BW [00:42:09] And didn't want—they first of all, they didn't even want to tell us about it. So, when we found out, we said, 'Well, that can be the basis of payment for the Employee and Family—

GD [00:42:21] Assistance program, yeah.

BW [00:42:21] You know, Employee and Family—

GD [00:42:25] We call that EFAP.

BW [00:42:26] Yeah. Right. For, yeah—I just. I'm old, see. It'll come to me.

GD [00:42:33] That's okay.

BW [00:42:34] Employee family—people have private problems. They might be financial problems. They may have problems with drug problems. They have—all this will—of course, we weren't prepared to deal with their problems.

GD [00:42:51] No.

BW [00:42:52] We weren't counsellors. Murray Krause, who later became a city councilor, he was a counsellor for —a drug and alcohol counsellor— formed what was called Interlock. Interlock was—well, it cost a fee for employee per year, but it was really, really cheap, and so we signed our people on to Interlock and that was then as an employee assistance program (it's what I'm trying to call it), and this was our first experience with it. And it really turned out to be really great because the counsellors kept everything to themselves.

GD [00:43:45] Yeah, it's all confidential.

BW [00:43:46] Except for two subjects. One was they were they were obligated on child abuse, and they were obligated on—what the hell was the other one?

GD [00:43:55] Suicide?

BW [00:43:58] Yes, suicide. And people would talk about suicide, and they were obligated to spill that to somebody that could stop it. Other than that, everything was like, between them, that was confidential between them, which gave—which was the whole key of the thing. Because if you had a program that didn't have the credibility of people that went there, got some help. The city never knew their names; we never knew their names, but we had kind of a client summary of how many clients, what's the basic problem.

GD [00:44:32] The usage.

BW [00:44:33] Some of the problems were definitely booze. Like, was most likely the biggest problem for that time and so helped a lot of people clean up so they could save their jobs. Because it was down to you. This is your last shot. We either go down this road, or you go down that road.

GD [00:44:55] That was great. Was that funded by the UI rebate?

BW [00:44:59] Yes, that was one thing that there was then—well, we found pretty much an instant use for it. Then we explained our whole position with Murray Krause and cut a deal, and we signed a contract for—I can't remember the length of the first contract. Then we advertised it internally, what the thing was. I had meetings. I had the counsellors there for the members to talk, see what it was about. What it was about is, look, if you come to the end of your rope, or you're afraid your husband's going to commit suicide, or you're afraid of something that's going on and you need some help, and they would get you to help. They would put you in the right—they never paid for your help, but they would get a person that needed some kind of—whatever counselling applied to whatever their position. They were enablers for those people to get that counselling.

GD [00:46:06] A great program.

BW [00:46:07] Yeah, absolutely.

GD [00:46:10] How did work at the city change over time? I mean, obviously it's different now than it was when in the seventies.

BW [00:46:16] Automation was one.

GD [00:46:17] Automation?

BW [00:46:18] Automation was a big thing. I think part of it, a lot of it, too, is there was (in the early days), there was less budgetary public concern about—

GD [00:46:31] Right.

BW [00:46:32] So, they had more employees. When I started in 1974, I can't remember which one of all these subdivisions that we got in town here that we worked on, but the city was in the land developing business kind of as well. Like, what we did is they would—engineers, whatever, would decide, okay, we're going to do a subdivision. Usually, a lot of it was depending on the cost because what we did is we paved over all of our past resources over those years. We made them so that there was still lots of really good available gravel, and Edgewood Terrace gravel pit is a good example of that. What did they build right beside it? The subdivision, right. They just experimented from there because it was cheap, cheaper to work in the right conditions, right. The last place you want to put a subdivision is in clay because the whole thing doesn't have the same working things. Nothing underground works the same. Percolation, the water doesn't want to percolate, and so one is a lot more developed than the other is. So, they develop all spots with — that's what most of the gravel we needed. Well, we never bought from gravel or anything, but later years ended up buying gravel.

GD [00:47:50] Right.

BW [00:47:50] Gravel pit owners that were left up open.

GD [00:47:53] My place is built on glacial till, right. You get down about six inches and you're into gravel and rocks.

BW [00:47:59] Yeah. Where do you live?

BW [00:48:06] Yeah.

GD [00:48:08] It was built in the sixties—'67, I think.

BW [00:48:11] Yeah. I was going to say that was already here when—yeah. So, it I was just before I came, and they did all of those, all the subdivisions up close to Ospika actually everything on that side of Ospika, that was— Ospika was kind of like the original, you know, the original bypass. That didn't last so long. That was for keeping, you know, from going through downtown, and it just became like the centre of town. The residentially mostly. Yeah.

BW [00:48:47] There was good money in it for the city, because they were able to sell service lots. Service lots are expensive for contractors to do all the servicing, so city crews did it, and they weren't just like part of this crew. They were in the first part of it like I was involved, very heavily involved in construction. For example, I used to drive a crane truck and deliver pipe and then string the pipe along the edge of the ditch the operator'd have so that he'd have his pile on one side, back in the way, so you know, have to the your slope—

GD [00:49:30] Yeah.

BW [00:49:30] And stuff like that. I'd string it all along so that after, you know, I'd come along and do that after, after she was dug and then a machine he'd go back over and like just right down the middle and he'd pick it up layer it, roll it like that, and I—so, I'd be just behind where he was digging and then that used to be what I did mostly. Then I'd deliver, also deliver, the manholes and all that stuff. The manhole barrels are four foot, and they weigh about 1,000 pounds a foot. How much is it? I can't remember. But they're very, very heavy. Exactly. So, you have to know, you know, how many you'd stack because for whatever job they were doing it would be. If it was—they were doing a hole that would be 12 foot deep you'd four barrels. And then they used different—that would be four foot barrels, or they could be combinations. They used to have four: one foot, two foot, three foot, four foot. That's what we had that we built. We started building our own too to save ourselves a whole bunch of money because they were easy to build. Once you had this steel frame and you would just use it over and over, you just knocked them out. That saved us a lot of money too. That was another proposal that was put by—from the union to the city. We actually held a lot of our jobs. We had to fight for them by showing we could do it cheaper. We started the pro—it wasn't the city fathers. It was us that went to them with the proposal. We had our foremans figure it, you know, our member foremans figuring out costs and stuff. What our proposal was, was cleaning the end of driveways after the graders went by. Because before you had this great big window and it was tough.

GD [00:51:23] I know. I shoveled them.

BW [00:51:25] Yeah. So, that was our proposal that we would have—we figured out what it would cost to run with a grader—

GD [00:51:34] Two graders with the gates.

BW [00:51:35] Yeah, they do but they only work in—they only work—they don't work in most areas. Like the Hart, they don't work in it at all, whatever. Because the amount of snow that it builds actually can't just stop the debris big mounds of snow, and you make you make a mess with grader gates. And the other thing is they have to—driveways have to be far enough apart so that after a grader gate has got through one, he can dissipate it, unload the end of it, and so he can dig in fresh. Because they're either too wide or the thing—be about close together—they had to be—they worked when they were further spread apart much better because they had that little time to get— listen, because in town it was all they did. We tried them. We had—

GD [00:52:30] Oh, yeah.

BW [00:52:30] Yeah, we tried.

GD [00:52:31] I know, I remember. It was a brilliant idea.

BW [00:52:33] Because we had a lot more snow and didn't have room to unload that snow.

GD [00:52:37] Yeah.

BW [00:52:37] And they just kind of went pushing it along from driveway to driveway it became more time backing up, turn it around, playing around than they're worth. It's much easier to follow with either—

GD [00:52:47] With a loader.

BW [00:52:49] A loader, or in some cases just the backhoes would work. The backhoes we would have sitting there ordinarily parked for the season. We could throw those backhoes. This made the whole thing cheaper too because we had equipment that could do it when it's not being used. So, we could put that together, and so we could, you know, follow that equipment, and—but we didn't do it with the trucks because, for a long time, like, because they could really do a good enough job. We didn't use—they didn't use grates, but you used a wing blade and a belly plow and a front plow depending on what amount of snow you got.

GD [00:53:33] So, did you drive those snow plows and the graders?

BW [00:53:35] Oh, yeah.

GD [00:53:37] Yeah, now it's two graders and two loaders that go along, eh?

BW [00:53:40] Yeah, well yeah. We used to—that's what you call a chain. Most of the time—like out in Hart it would be two loaders and a grader worked excellently, eh.

GD [00:53:51] Yeah.

BW [00:53:52] And then lots of times, too, if we had something available, whatever we could do it. The trucks would also phone in on—well they, first example was bus routes, right? So,—

GD [00:54:05] Yeah.

BW [00:54:06] They do often get help with bus routes. A little bit if the guy would go back, and he's gone through. The bus routes clear, but later as you went through the day, start pickin' out those driveways for people wherever we had time or people to do that, we would do it. So, that was really our suggestion to the city. We put it forth, and I can remember that, not the exact amount, I do remember it was between three and four dollars per housekeeper per year to have the driveways done like that. We didn't put this forth exactly so that all these guys would jump on the bandwagon because they knew this was a cheap option. We knew who is in favor of it, and that's—they had to kind of introduce. We couldn't introduce this as whatever. They had to introduce it to the rest of city council by saying, 'Now, you know, we've never really done this before but cleaning driveways.' And everybody said, 'Yeah, it's too expensive.' And I said, 'Well, how much did it cost? Well, nobody knew, but they knew because they'd already had figures in the trial, figures and everything else. Once that became popular it just became like, yes, right away. People wanted it. They wanted it—

GD [00:55:22] Oh, yeah.

BW [00:55:23] Right off the bat. And that's how we were able to maintain that which helped us maintain our fleet and the whole snow—because we really have a sophisticated snow cleaning program now because we have to, you know.

BW [00:55:38] It's a snowy city. (laughter) So, we talked a little bit about Labour Council before. And when I came in, the Labour Council was in the basement of the Carpenters' Hall.

BW [00:55:52] Oh for sure. The Carpenters' Hall, that's where we had our— everybody labour, all kinds of small locals and stuff. It was a perfect little place. So, we—it had—it was rented out pretty steady, like it was so many unions that that was—they rented it out, and we actually rented an office, 399 in that building. And as it was, so we could keep a photocopier and whatever else, but it was all like—it was in a room, one of the rooms of that thing. And so, it was—like a photocopier was, it wasn't used like most are used because it wasn't be used every day. That made it a little difficult because what we used it more, making up bulletins and stuff like for our own because—and so we had to have a service agreement thing on. So, we didn't, you know, so it actually turned out to be expensive for us—more expensive than the average because we didn't use it as much. But the maintenance for a (oh, I don't know), because the wet copiers that they had at the time, they all, they had like they had cartridges to changed and they had to be changed or they dried up to, you know, if they weren't used and stuff like that. So, they'd have to be maintained all the time. So, that's where we had set up our first small union office. Anyway, also we had enough place where we could have an executive meeting.

GD [00:57:19] So, do you remember the office, when the Labour Council was up on Alward at Fifth? Because a lot of the stuff in the late seventies that I was looking at, some of the ads were talking about 909 Fifth.

BW [00:57:35] Fifth. That was—yeah, that was the old Carpenters' Hall.

GD [00:57:40] That was the old Carpenters' Hall, yeah.

BW [00:57:41] Yes. That's where we were—that's—my recollections, that's where we were when I got going.

GD [00:57:46] Okay.

BW [00:57:46] That's where—

GD [00:57:47] So, when did it move down to the other side of Queensway?

BW [00:57:53] Oh, well we moved, when did CUPE move?

GD [00:57:55] Yeah.

BW [00:57:56] Yeah. They moved firstly from there up to Abhau Street.

GD [00:58:04] Oh. Okay.

BW [00:58:04] The buildings—there's—into rental.

GD [00:58:09] Yeah.

BW [00:58:09] Rental property in there. CUPE moved their office there because it wasn't our office.

GD [00:58:15] So, that's just a block off of Central, right? Behind Spruce Land?

BW [00:58:18] Yeah. It's right behind Spruce Land, right on the corner of Fifth and Abhau on the north side. So, that's where CUPE put their—and we also opened another one room, small little office right across the hall, and we had a photocopier in there. The main reason we wanted office space was so they could have executive meetings some place, and they didn't have to have it at somebody's house or rent a expensive place. It was always available to us. So, that's a—that was from Abhau Street. It was Abhau and then I'm not sure after that. So, that's where it was when I left, and I think that they ended up over in Parkwood Centre. Then they moved from Parkwood Centre, they moved to wherever they are exactly, I don't [trails off].

GD [00:59:08] Operation Solidarity.

BW [00:59:09] Oh, yeah. Operation Solidarity was the most exciting thing to me.

GD [00:59:13] Okay.

BW [00:59:14] When it came up; it was a wonderful thing.

GD [00:59:15] Okay, tell me about.

BW [00:59:17] It taught people what solidarity meant. It spread it amongst the world, and it helped—I mean, we'd been singing "Solidarity Forever" forever. Battle Hymn of the Republic. [unclear] are adopted, which we call our hymn.

GD [00:59:34] Yes.

BW [00:59:35] We refer to it in—that is labour's hymn. I can remember Art Kube who was—he was, oh, he was—what the hell was he? He worked for the Fed [BC Federation of Labour] because we dealt with the Fed and the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress]. They were two different bodies but for different things.

GD [00:59:56] Yeah.

BW [00:59:56] And he was—Kube was an instructor and like the final wind up at every year's thing was they closed everything off singing "Solidarity Forever". Still brings tears.

GD [01:00:11] Yeah.

BW [01:00:13] Like he'd say, 'Now we'll sing our hymn'. (laughter) That's how much it meant to us. Us labour people.

GD [01:00:21] Yeah.

BW [01:00:22] Cause the words, everybody knew the words.

GD [01:00:27] So, in '83, Bennett passed a whole bunch of legislation, and labour did not like it.

BW [01:00:34] (laughter) Yeah, that's a way of puttin' it, all right.

GD [01:00:37] Yeah.

BW [01:00:38] Yeah. Everything sort of—

GD [01:00:40] So, what was happening here in Prince George?

BW [01:00:43] In '83? Things were goin'—

GD [01:00:46] I know there were rallies. The strikes built over the course of the fall.

BW [01:00:52] Lots of them. Yeah, I've got pictures if I could find them at home of one of them at the Ramada Inn— I'm just trying to think what it was called at the time.

GD [01:01:07] The Yellowhead?

LWK [01:01:07] The Holiday Inn.

GD [01:01:09] The Holiday Inn. Okay.

BW [01:01:10] The Holiday Inn. Pardon me. Holiday Inn. Yeah. Thanks. Because that's where we cheered each other. Yeah, at the Holiday Inn. There was a huge rally. It was one of the best coverages because there was so many people, and The Citizen was on top of this one. The press and radios and stuff never used to hardly give us the time of day.

GD [01:01:32] Right.

BW [01:01:33] The right-wing backed media.

GD [01:01:36] The media. Yeah.

BW [01:01:37] We weren't on their side.

GD [01:01:39] No. Yeah. So—

BW [01:01:44] That was a great, that was a great rally. I can remember we had all kinds of speakers. I can remember Andrew—what was his name? He was the guy that got the big $10 million settlement in Northern Alberta. Was one of our Truth and—big Native, first big Native settlement north. Andrew—he ran for the NDP. (laughter) Here we go. It'll come to me. But this guy was—like his percentage, his payoff was 10 million for negotiating this huge settlement for Natives in Northern Alberta.

LWK [01:02:25] Andrew Schuck.

BW [01:02:27] Andrew Schuck. Yeah. He ran for the NDP politically in this town. (laughter) He was just puttin' out that face forward to show it there because it's so Conservative, you know, a strong conservative strong hold.

GD [01:02:44] Yeah.

BW [01:02:44] Always has been.

GD [01:02:48] Yeah. So—.

BW [01:02:48] It was always uphill for us.

GD [01:02:50] Yeah. And then Solidarity. The Canadian Tire strike.

BW [01:02:55] Yeah. I can remember being in Vancouver standing in snow in my street shoes, holding up a sign on the—we were together on that weren't we? Yeah, and I was in a causeway for—Stanley Park Causeway coming off the Lions Gate Bridge—and we were in there with the Operation holding up the Operation Solidarity signs in the snow.

GD [01:03:18] Right.

BW [01:03:20] In Vancouver and I lived up here. I was down there at the time on labour business so.

GD [01:03:26] Yeah.

BW [01:03:27] Draft everybody out; they needed bodies, so you went.

GD [01:03:31] I know. I remember rallies over in Victoria where you get the busses and go across on the ferry, and—

BW [01:03:36] Yeah, keep at it.

BW [01:03:39] That's what really woke people up I think to a labour was understanding that. Before that, before Solidarity had come, people actually had less understanding of what unions do and stuff. Like a lot of people never, they weren't part of one, or whatever. Even if they were, they just knew that they had to pay union dues, to make—pay some union dues to make higher wages. So, it was okay. (laughter)

GD [01:04:05] So, let's turn to—when did you retire?

BW [01:04:11] When I retired in—when I was 55. It was part of the plan. That's something else. I realized how important it was with public service unions because the option is if you pay in for a combination of so many years and so much service, you hit your golden number in there—ka ching—and you're now eligible for a pension at 55.

GD [01:04:35] Okay.

BW [01:04:35] If you have paid, but that amount of pension that you're going to get at 55 depends strictly on how much you've put into it over the years. So, say, as somebody who has worked constantly for the City of Prince George, and I did, would receive a pension of about 66 and two thirds of what their last hourly rate would be. Or, if they were hourly, salary, or whatever, whatever schedule they'd be paid under and—

GD [01:05:05] That's a pretty good pension.

BW [01:05:06] That's a pretty damn good pension. And, as far as—it was all—it was taxable because it was also deductible.

GD [01:05:21] Yeah.

BW [01:05:22] It was a great deduction for us. Helped us along.

GD [01:05:26] The pension contribution? Yeah.

BW [01:05:28] Yeah. The contributions. Yeah.

GD [01:05:31] So you retired at 55, did you do—

BW [01:05:33] I did. I actually retired 50—I was so god damn gung ho to retire. I retired at 55 less so many days so I was actually still fif—I turned 55 on time owed me. I was better off to take just like I says, okay, and I calculated it all up and I says on the 25th of February, I believe it—no. I can't remember what month. I know we had planned to do things on the 25th because I could always remember the date if it was Christmas. I remember Christmas. Like our anniversary, the twenty-fifth of February (laughter) Yeah. So, I try to use that if I want to do something important, I do it on the 25th of a month, and it's easier for me to remember. But it was—yeah, it was—it was the 25th of October, I retired and I was actually my birthday in February was on the 19th. I remember, I became 55, retired already. (laughter) You know—

GD [01:06:38] So that was—

BW [01:06:38] Physically wasn't on the job. I was being paid a little before retirement because I had lots of money, extra money that could buy me an earlier retirement date. You know, in benefits, accumulated benefits. To me, it was a better than the pay out on the sick leave and so on, so I did—

GD [01:07:01] Forty-seven, 55. That's '92, '93. Somewhere in there?

BW [01:07:05] No, 2000.

GD [01:07:08] 2000.

BW [01:07:08] Was it? I thought it was 2002.

GD [01:07:11] 2002. Yes. Okay. My math is off. I teach history, not math. (laughter)

BW [01:07:21] Mine's almost nonexistent. I have my own.

GD [01:07:23] So tell me, what would you say to young workers today?

BW [01:07:28] Clueless. In so many ways. They just don't know, depending on what fields. If they're trained properly and whatever, and they've gone through some kind of proper training—they've had the education on it—it's totally different attitudes as to off the street. Off the streets, only willing to go so far, and they, and they're not—they don't have the attitude to do what we used to. Let's see what this develops into and give it a bit of time. Most people tended to do that, and I think now people, depending on if they feel this is too hard for them or whatever, then they tend to not do it.

GD [01:08:08] What do you think the most important issue facing young workers today is?

BW [01:08:14] Whoa. I guess, you know, I've just come out of the hospital, I've been sick. I was in twice over two weeks.

GD [01:08:19] Oh dear.

BW [01:08:20] Well, to me one of the most obvious is what I see is ethnics. Like young people are training up in the university here as a work—our hospital being a working hospital, I see minorities. Minorities are by far more interested in training because most of them are. And I was very, very surprised to see that the nursing staff that's here that works are young people that are nurses and practical nurses and all the different kinds of things other than, say, doctors. And the mo—and you have doctors there's a difference. The whole thing is that there's so many more minority peoples: East Indians, Blacks, lots of Black people. It seemed like they were the people in the community had more drive. More want to do something—

GD [01:09:14] Yeah.

BW [01:09:15] And they, as to this day, I still saw a lot of younger people that don't plan on staying where they're doing, they plan on getting this and they're going to advance and advance and advance through the medical sciences because there's so many other—it's not all doctors and nurses that run—its medical sciences, lab techs, all this sort of stuff. So, I'm not just talking about cleaning staff and like of that when I say minorities. Far more young East Indian and young Blacks. And yet we—I think if you take the amount of Black people, for example, in Prince George isn't really a high rate. But I think most of them are all working and a lot of them are working in the medical profession. And you know how, it'll branch off. You can be, you can sort of be a lab tech, you can be a doctor, you can be anybody provides any of those services that we don't see. Usually what we see is the obvious doctors and nurses and tend to not think so much about the lab tech comes and takes vials. Then the other person comes and does all your other things that are having to be done.

GD [01:10:29] So, the health sector is going to be growing because it's going to have to deal with us older folks.

BW [01:10:35] Oh, absolutely. And it's—and what I—from what I could see, I do support the present government, even what I see is it's terribly underfunded. It really needs—they really need more people because when there's beds in the halls, you need more people. And everybody was busy. And so, you think twice before—I did have a call bell, right. Always say wait for somebody to be around there you ask them, 'Could you, know, grab that for me.' Hate to call bell. Somebody that's doing something to take them away from what they're doing for something trivial that could be handled by, of course, having more people around there because they're all bloody busy. Yeah.

GD [01:11:20] So, why is it important that we commemorate workers of the past?

BW [01:11:25] Well. Injured workers. There's a little statue on Queensway—

GD [01:11:34] The memorial.

BW [01:11:36] Yeah. People are—remembrance day [International Workers' Memorial Day] for workers killed on the job.

GD [01:11:41] April the 28th.

BW [01:11:42] Yeah. April 28th. I fought hard for April 28.

GD [01:11:45] Yeah.

BW [01:11:45] Where my own union and through the CLC. And because we always thought that they were just unrecognized, and maybe if they were recognized that people died, maybe less people would die, and less people would get hurt.

GD [01:12:02] Yeah.

BW [01:12:02] So, I thought it was really was a great, great movement.

GD [01:12:07] So, that—the memorial itself—it was just after you retired?

BW [01:12:11] Yeah, I didn't—I wasn't active at the time. I wished it was because something I fought for, for a long time. We brought it up at Labour Council was the push.

GD [01:12:22] Yeah.

BW [01:12:22] And finally, I believe it—and we had to have a day of recognition, and the day of recognition was a hard thing because it's a political, it's a political fight no matter how you do it because, you know—

GD [01:12:37] It can't be Victoria Day, or Easter.

BW [01:12:39] Any kind of holiday is always a fight to pass because employers say, 'Do I want to pay for another holiday for—', you know.

GD [01:12:48] No. That was that was pretty good. So, why does labour history matter to you?

BW [01:12:54] Labour history? That matters to us really, really a whole lot because it seemed like you saw it first in the States. But as unions become sort of less prominent, people forget who they do. And it's remember, the people who brought you the weekend.

GD [01:13:15] Yeah.

BW [01:13:16] Yeah. That's why we had that slogan and proud of it. There was a publicity kind of a thing that labour had to fight to say, 'We're not the bad bastards that just take your money and give you nothing. We give you holidays. We give you better wage conditions—'

GD [01:13:35] Benefits. Yeah.

BW [01:13:37] 'We make your job safer.' And they have to agree by law, and this is where now when an employer is breaking a law, WCB BC [Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia], being the overseer, they'll fine them. When it starts coming out of their pockets, you start changing their tune. The city was extremely safety oriented to work for. They were very good because they got fined a lot because they were easy pickings for the WCB [unclear] some guy would have to come. He didn't have to actually be on the scene to fine them. He could fine them two months after the job because he'd see a patch of pavement when it was dug out. So, then he'd go and find out why that was dug out. Well, it was dug out to fix the water main, right. 'Yeah, a water main?' And a water is nine feet

deep. 'Well, how come this friggin' whole is only 12 by 20?' In other words, where was the sloping?

GD [01:14:42] Yes.

BW [01:14:42] You cannot prove you sloped. You're guilty.

GD [01:14:46] Yeah.

BW [01:14:48] You prove your innocence. You could prove your innocence. For example, say you dug a trough with no slope, and it was nine feet deep like this. And it was in a roadway, and you had a pipe, and you could put a rope through the pipe and drag a whole assembled pipe. That's by putting a rope to right through the end of it so that your back end—when you pull the pipe being pushed, right, essentially, if you put rope so your piece of equipment, we could drag assembled pipe through and lay it in on—a machine can dig it right down, put the proper surfacing gravel that was going to be bedding on whatever kind of surface, and you can drag it into that, actually. And that is—if you can prove you did that—that's okay. And they did actually do an awful lot of non—they wouldn't be legal to put trenches to do pipe in if they were ever anybody down there. First thing they do when you come to the site, even though a guy's still digging and he says, 'Oh, I just dug this out.' 'Why are these footprints down there?' Ka ching. (laughter) Up comes another fine, eh. So, because they were kind of, you know, they were easy to get at, and they knew that the city could afford to pay these. And that they were a perfect example to put up in their in their, you know, when they put out their monthly magazine. They always post what companies get fined for compensation violations and how much they are. They're not just like $250. They're like 25,000 or 40,000—and they go on the scale too. Caught once, 25; caught twice 50, and so on, so—

GD [01:16:47] It becomes painful.

BW [01:16:48] This was all meant to dissuade any interest in breaking the rules. It didn't—there was no profit in breaking. If you've got caught, it cost a hell of lot more. And it was a great thing, I think, because it really did people give some education to opening it up to doing it the right way in the first place.

GD [01:17:06] Yeah. There was just a crew in at the end of our neighborhood along the bypass, replacing the sewer line across the Nechako river. So, I stopped to talk with them when they were setting up. And, you know, 'What are you guys doing?' And he said, 'Well, we're replacing the sewer line.' It was determined that there was a leak in the in the pipe over the river three years ago. They'd had the pipe for three years, and they just got the authorization this summer to put it in.

BW [01:17:35] Yeah. That's sort of —

BW [01:17:39] Sounds about right?

BW [01:17:39] You've got to fight the bureaucracy all the time. Yeah. You've got just go back for more money. Well, we've got this, now we need money to install it. Yeah, common.

GD [01:17:48] So, kinda the last word. What would you—what's one thing you would wish young workers understood about labour history?

BW [01:17:59] That it didn't come easy. What you're getting benefits now didn't exist not that long ago. For example, I have hearing aids, which it's hard to put—to ever get WCB to approve a hearing claim. Hardest of all.

GD [01:18:24] Okay.

BW [01:18:25] But I knew how to do it being union stuff, I had the evidence. I saved every hearing card because I had to have my hearing tested every year. WCB orders in construction. You have to have that so you can hear well enough when there's machines running around you or something fires up and you don't hear it and get hurt. So, it has a kind of a standard there. So, WCB, I took, and I had all of those cards when I made my application. I said that at the time, I don't believe that hearing protection was in the regulations. What the only hearing protection that all the sudden showed up with ear—they had earplugs. Free from the employer and the employer also supplied the overhead hearing things. In some jobs, like you have the hearing things are attached to hard hardhats and stuff like that. All that stuff became available then. But before that, I don't think, I think there is a hell of a lot of people that have really bad hearing from work experience noise. But I was also able to tell them how I used to run jackhammers without a hearing protection because basically it wasn't hearing protection. And I ran all kinds of equipment that was not designed for the operator's comfort. It was, you know, they could they can build the stuff quiet, an example of that is a washing machine. Quiet [unclear] So they made washing machines quieter. Well, they could do the same with basically anything on earth if they want to spend the money. This kind of enforced a lot of manufacturers to step up their game, shall we say, to make them more operator friendly without as much noise and stuff like that, and then supply protection and. And I was kind of educated, it was mostly the unions that educated employers, but to educate their employees, to say to them, 'This is your responsibility to supply this stuff so we don't damage our hearing. That was all done by labour. That was not done by companies. Companies, they didn't see a profit in any part of that.

GD [01:20:47] Yeah.

BW [01:20:47] Until they started realizing they got deaf employees and that they retire, and they lose their employer. Yeah, all because you could've paid a small amount for hearing protection. Started when it started to make business sense. That's kind of when they paid—helped me take protection unless there was something—a body to force them, like the WCB. A hygienist would come down and look at things and say, 'You know, you got to fix this up.' Or, if I'd have a complaint with something I couldn't resolve with an employer where one guy would have this constantly be affected elbow because he was reaching for a lever on a garbage truck and bang in it. I said to the WCB inspector that came down, I said, 'You know, 50 bucks could make this whole thing and leastways, he's not going to bung up.' I said 2,000 bucks would eliminate the whole thing, and they put a hydraulic joystick, right. Replaces is the way it's built now, and the WCB said, 'We think the joystick is the best option.' So, they had to put that new system, advanced it on this garbage truck. So, one old guy had nothing but problems from this, and a constant (I won't mention his name), but I remember and just—he lost a lot of time, and it was—he'd be going on WCB because it's the same thing.

GD [01:22:17] Yeah, workplace.

BW [01:22:17] Till he finally got their safety officer said, 'Well, you know, there's a limitation to how much we can.' I said, 'Well just—I says 'We'll be talking again.'

GD [01:22:29] Yeah.

BW [01:22:30] So, I got one of the WCB and tell them where, they send down, well he's a hygienist, actually. And then he looked at it and he says—I had the operator there and show them the problems, right. As soon as this guy started up, [lifts up his are and looks at his elbow.] That was it. (laughter) He explained everything to this guy. Give him mass detail, and so that was the resolvement of that. Just having somebody there to tell the employer, 'No, that's not safe.' Of course, the other thing was back, was called 8.01, was the right to refuse. That was, to me, one of the best regulations ever brought in because it saved a lot of lives because people were told to do stuff, and it could be—they could be killed doing it. In other words, you didn't have somebody there that was taking responsibility, telling you to do something that's dangerous. And if you don't do it, you fired. That was kind of where things went before 8.02 arrived and that 8.02 put a stop to that. No worker shall have to do whatever job that they feel unsafe and then it's to be reviewed on call—like before the job is done by anyone. And then, no other person can be asked to job that another worker has refused to do because it's safe. Well, this was huge because we could now call the WCB. We had somebody with some teeth that could come down and say, 'You can't do that. That's unsafe, you know. We wouldn't insure you if you were an insurance company.' I mean, if we were insurance company and unfortunately, all in all, that's what the WCB has become now. That's where they get all of their executives, and the executives give speeches and they use common words like, 'Would you insure this guy?' So, they have that mentality now, which the WCB was not formed by labour. It was formed—

GD [01:24:43] Not meant to be a business. Employers.

BW [01:24:45] Employers to protect themselves from lawsuits. That's why the whole WCB exists. A lot of people think oh it was a great thing for people because people got, you know, got helped out when they got hurt, but before that, they didn't get helped out before they got hurt and you know, they had no—employers had no obligation to help. So consequently, what started to happen was that, every employee sued every employer and a lot of legal, a lot of lawyers were willing to take these cases because the employer had blatantly screwed up. And so that we—the only way you could get back at that time was to prove, was to sue them individually. But pardon my language, they've fucked up so much that they realized they had—'we can't do this. We cannot be sued for everything we do wrong.' So, they wanted a board, another entity to avoid the liability of being sued. That's the reason the creation for WCB was employers created it to avoid the direct potential of lawsuits. So, because they were actually legally responsible for people that were injured under their employment before that. So, that was for—they were—they knew that they would be totally overrun by lawsuits unless they had some other way of dealing with it. And that's why the worker's compensation board was set up. It wasn't the unions that wanted it. It was employers wanted it to evade being prosecuted and sued, and they were liable as hell being, starting to get sued. They couldn't handle—they had to have another way of financially dealing with this. All in all, it was a great creation because it set some rules and it set— however, it wasn't—

GD [01:26:48] Labour response. No.

BW [01:26:50] It wasn't their first idea.

GD [01:26:53] Do you have any questions to ask?

NF [01:26:57] No, I wanted to thank you so much for being here this morning.

GD [01:26:59] Thank you. Thank you. It's been—

BW [01:27:03] My pleasure. Stuff I like to talk about actually because being just in my kinda I guess in my blood, I inherited it from my dad. But it's just that—that's kind of the thing I find rewarding because you know something I did in life, it was all basically for the love of what I was doing. I believed in it so much that I didn't give a shit. I was getting my paycheck, but I could have got a bigger one by doing whatever, but to me that was an easy way of operation. And especially it was easier for me to make some differences because what I did was public and with public employees, with your—elect your own bosses, and that was our whole theme. When we came to political action, we were going to elect people that thought our way. We weren't—we didn't care about the Brian Brownridges and all the fine examples of business.

GD [01:28:09] Yeah.

BW [01:28:10] That wasn't in our interest. Our interest was in workers. And so, we—politicians, or would-be politicians soon realize that there's a hell of a lot of votes out there that we've never really gone after. So, now it brought that kind of light into it and I just kind of rolled with the machine.

GD [01:28:35] Well, thank you so much for this.

BW [01:28:36] Okay.