Interview: Anne Davis (AD)
Interviewer: Rod Mickleburgh (RM)
Date: July 6, 2025
Location: Courtenay, BC
Transcription: Donna Sacuta

[00:00:05.12] - RM

Anne Davis, welcome.

[00:00:06.18] - AD

Thank you.

[00:00:07.10] - RM

So I want to know about you.

[00:00:09.03] - AD

What's that?

[00:00:10.01] - RM

I want to know about you.

[00:00:11.05] - AD

You want to know about me? Okay.

[00:00:12.16] - RM

So go right back to the beginning. Where did you grow up, your background and that kind of stuff?

[00:00:17.10] - AD

I grew up mostly in Victoria, Winnipeg for a few years mid-childhood. My mom was an activist in the women's movement quite early, and the peace movement. One of my early memories of my

mom, of my mom's activism, was in Winnipeg when she got up in the middle of the night to go and stand at the corner of Portage and Main as part of a 24-hour women's vigil for Ban the Bomb, I think was the campaign. She was very involved with Voice of Women. My dad was senior management with the federal government, and because of his position, he wasn't supposed to be involved in politics, but he was a huge supporter of my mother.

[00:01:12.15] - RM

When was that, that she stood at the corner of Portage and Main?

[00:01:15.22] - AD

When was it? It would have been the early '60s.

[00:01:18.08] - RM

Wow.

[00:01:18.29] - AD

Yeah, I'm guessing somewhere around the Cuban Missile Crisis, maybe somewhere in that range.

[00:01:24.06] - RM

Some of us older people remember that.

[00:01:26.16] - AD

Yes, indeed.

[00:01:27.08] - RM

It was a frightening time. Voice of Women, it was fairly strong on the Island, as I recall.

[00:01:34.05] - AD

Yeah, it was, and I think it was very strong in Winnipeg too.

[00:01:38.00] - RM

Oh, when did you move? Did you move back to Victoria?

[00:01:40.20] - AD

Yes, Victoria, then Winnipeg, then back to Victoria.

[00:01:42.25] - RM

When did you move back to Victoria?

[00:01:44.25] - AD

In 19—I'm thinking—1966.

[00:01:49.17] - RM

Yeah, because I remember my aunt who lived in Courtenay, was also involved in Voice of Women, and they had vigils out at the Air Force base in Comox and stuff like that.

[00:02:01.23] - AD

Yes, that's right.

[00:02:03.04] - RM

That's actually, all I know about it, so I assume they certainly were active on Vancouver Island. Oh, and then Nanoose Bay, of course, I guess.

[00:02:11.14] - AD

Yes.

[00:02:12.06] - RM

About the missile testing there. So you grew up in this atmosphere of activism.

[00:02:18.01] - AD

Yeah, yeah, which I think was a great start in life. I had no involvement, or I'd never had any kind of access to unions. I didn't know anything about unions as a kid. I knew that my—that there was a union or some iteration at that time in my dad's workplace, and I knew that he had coffee with the stewards every Friday afternoon. I knew that much, and that was everything I knew about unions at that time.

[00:02:52.16] - RM

Well, he must have been a good manager to have actually done that. I mean, I don't think a lot of managers would have coffee on Friday with their shop stewards.

[00:02:59.23] - AD

Yeah, well, he was very respectful of working people. I mean, he came from a poor background himself, you know, and it was only because of post-World War Two funding, because he'd been in the military, that he was able to go to college and, you know, move up in the world.

[00:03:17.29] - RM

You know, these people that bitch about government, I mean, that's one of the best things the government ever did, and they should have done it, was the scholarships and allowing the returning veterans to go to school.

[00:03:29.09] - AD

Definitely.

[00:03:29.25] - RM

And so many took advantage of it, like your father. My uncle did, and, you know, I just— two uncles actually, and you know, you talk to—I talked to a lot of veterans, and so many took advantage of that program. It was again something they should have done, but they did it. That shows you what government can do with a positive, focused program.

[00:03:51.19] - AD

Yeah, and then that makes a difference for those people's children, and it just keeps rolling.

[00:03:58.19] - RM

Did you have brothers and sisters?

[00:04:00.23] - AD

Yes, two brothers and a sister.

[00:04:02.27] - RM

Were they activists too, or just you?

[00:04:06.07] - AD

Well, one died young. My one brother became a corporate lawyer.

[00:04:13.02] - RM

The black sheep.

[00:04:14.29] - AD

Well, unfortunately, he saw himself that way in the family, which I think was kind of sad. He's a very decent person. My sister came out as a lesbian in— the very early '70s and was very involved in kind of gay rights at that point.

[00:04:38.20] - RM

The early days.

[00:04:39.14] - AD

Yeah, yeah.

[00:04:40.29] - RM

And were you involved in activism in high school or anything like that?

[00:04:46.04] - AD

You know, I went to a Catholic high school in Victoria, St. Anne's Academy, and the sisters who taught there were a fairly liberal group. When there were the protests against Amchitka, I remember the sisters led all the students in the school out to the legislature, and we walked around the legislature with hundreds, if not thousands, of other people singing "Give Peace a Chance" in our private school uniforms.

[00:05:21.07] - RM

That's amazing.

[00:05:22.03] - AD

It is amazing. Yeah, it is amazing. Yeah, yeah.

[00:05:26.05] - RM

Are there any pictures of that? That would have been great.

[00:05:28.26] - AD

Not that I'm aware of.

[00:05:30.08] - RM

The nuns led the march against Amchitka.

[00:05:33.00] - AD

Yeah.

[00:05:33.20] - RM

Of course, there's always these two arms of the Catholic Church, right?

[00:05:36.02] - AD

Yes.

[00:05:36.05] - RM

Because there's the liberation theology people, but I wouldn't have expected that to show up in Victoria.

[00:05:41.28] - AD

No, many of those sisters left the order within the next few years.

[00:05:46.23] - RM

That's very interesting. So then I gather from reading a bit about you is that you came to the Comox Valley, still a teenager.

[00:05:54.26] - AD

Yes.

[00:05:55.11] - RM

Is that sort of your hippie days, or—

[00:05:57.18] - AD

Totally, absolutely. I came with my boyfriend at the time. We came up for the very first craft fair, Arts Alliance Craft Fair—Renaissance Fair, which was held around the fountain at the Civic Theatre, and somebody we met that day said, 'Oh, you should go check out Cumberland, it's this really, you know, interesting place.' So we went and had a look at Cumberland and fell in love with it. That was, I think it was July that we came up for the fair, and by September we had bought one of the old miners' houses on the Camp Road in Cumberland and were moving in. Yes.

[00:06:45.00] - RM

You were conscious that it was a former miner's house?

[00:06:47.25] - AD

Oh yeah, definitely.

[00:06:49.02] - RM

Did you learn about the history of Cumberland?

[00:06:51.13] - AD

Okay, so this is my kind of background to why Miners Memorial matters to me. So, you know, I'm a sweet young 19-year-old, right? I knew that the house had belonged to a man named Jimmy Ellis, known as Pansy Ellis, because Cumberland is all about nicknames, and that he had been there since the 1920s, if not earlier. This was 1974, and that he was currently in sort of the old folks home on Dunsmuir Avenue. So I went down to see him one day because I thought it would be nice to meet him. I had a few questions about the house, and I wanted to tell him that we really loved the house and we were going to take good care of it. So, you know, I came in and kind of introduced myself and started talking about that and asking some

questions, and he just—he told me to sit down and he told me the story of Ginger Goodwin. Wow.

[00:07:53.02] - RM

In 1974.

[00:07:54.11] - AD

1974. And I had no idea who Ginger Goodwin was, never heard of the guy, despite growing up basically on Vancouver Island. I didn't, you know, I don't think at that time that I really had kind of the context to fully understand that story, but I got it that something really important had happened in Cumberland, and that this was the story that this old miner wanted me to understand if I was going to move into his house and his community. So I never forgot that, you know, it really had an impact on me because he clearly felt so strongly about this story that he was passing on. There was no reason in a casual conversation to bring it up, like he was very, you know, 'You're going to hear this story.' So that, that's just something that I just kind of, you know, stuck up here and carried with me. It wasn't until quite a bit later that I really got what he was telling me that day.

[00:09:02.02] - RM

That's remarkable.

[00:09:03.28] - AD

Yeah, and I feel very fortunate to have heard that from him.

[00:09:08.16] - RM

Did he talk about his experiences working in the coal mine? Because I mean, people forget there was underground coal mining, which of course is very dangerous.

[00:09:17.27] - AD

Yes. No, he didn't talk about that. I found out much later that as a kid he had gone with his father to take food up to the people who were hiding up Comox Lake, Goodwin and the other war resistors who were up there. But no, that—our conversation mostly centered around Ginger Goodwin that day.

[00:09:40.06] - RM

You know, that's very interesting, and I know it's your interview, but I'll just interject here, because it wasn't just something bad that happened when Ginger Goodwin was shot. It was totally remembered by the community. When they named the mountain Ginger Goodwin Mountain, I was with CBC-TV then. I came up to do a piece on it, and of course I ended up talking to the legendary 'Bronco' Moncrief, who I'm sure you know. But anyway, he was positive about all that, and he said his dad would take them up into the mountain and show them where Ginger Goodwin had been shot and where he had hid out. So like, it was part of that lore, you know, and he remembered that very well. He also said he delivered newspapers to Joe Naylor.

[00:10:25.28] - AD

Oh yes, yes.

[00:10:27.06] - RM

So it stayed alive among the old-timers. The other thing, I'm just remembering this now, I talked to a woman in—not in the Cumberland old folks home, but in the one in—maybe it was in Comox— anyway, it doesn't matter what Cumberland, Comox, whatever. She was in assisted living, whatever it was called. She remembered as a young child the funeral procession through Cumberland, sort of standing on the side of the street and remembering all that and how much Ginger Goodwin was loved by the community. As you point out, they fed him and looked out for him.

[00:11:07.11] - AD

Oh yeah.

[00:11:08.23] - RM

Well, that is amazing. So you stayed living in Cumberland?

[00:11:12.28] - AD

Oh, for a while. Moved around the valley a bit, lived in different parts of the valley, but I'm still here 51 years later.

[00:11:21.21] - RM

What was Cumberland like in those days? Because it hadn't been yuppie-fied or gentrified then.

[00:11:25.24] - AD

No, Cumberland—I mean, there was a bit of a sadness to Cumberland back then. Cumberland, the rest of the valley referred to Cumberland as like Dodge and—

[00:11:40.17] - RM

Dogpatch.

[00:11:41.16] - AD

Dogpatch, yes, you've definitely done your homework on Cumberland. There was a feeling of sadness. There were a lot of old guys who kind of spent their days drinking. I mean, the town had 2,000 people, three bars, a liquor store, and a Legion, right?

[00:12:00.04] - RM

No, no, right on.

[00:12:00.29] - AD

Yeah, yeah. But there was also a lot of pride in Cumberland, and a very strong sense of community. The man who lived next door to us was gay. He had grown up in Cumberland. He was gay. He was—he listened to opera. Cumberlanders thought he was a bit strange. But God help anybody from outside the community who gave him a bad time, because he was one of their own, right? So it was that kind of community.

[00:12:36.20] - RM

Do you remember Leung's Grocery?

[00:12:38.17] - AD

Yes, absolutely.

[00:12:40.03] - RM

I know quite well Colleen Leung. That was her dad, right? That ran Leung's Grocery. Yeah, the sign's still up in the museum, I think.

[00:12:47.24] - AD

Yes.

[00:12:49.10] - RM

No, I've always loved Cumberland and my uncle was in Courtenay. In fact, when one of the hotels either burned down or was torn down, they had an auction of—I guess it went out of business. They had an auction of all their stuff, and he bought the great big pool table had been in the hotel, right? Put it in his basement very, very proudly. But I mean, there were always these, you know, I remember—uh, God, it's not about me, but I can't—I just love Cumberland so much.

[00:13:15.29] - AD

I do too.

[00:13:16.18] - RM

The basketball players in Courtenay always hated to play basketball in Cumberland because the guys would approach them in the parking lot and said, 'You better not play too well tonight,' that kind of stuff. Then they talked about being able to see their breath in the rec center and stuff like that. It was just such a unique community, and it was a tough community, hardscrabble, I think is the perfect word. Anyway, I better stop now. So you did a lot of different things, and then at—well, you could talk about any of them—but then you got involved with the Comox Valley Transition Society. How did that come about? Or do you want to talk about what led up to that?

[00:13:59.22] - AD

Yeah, maybe, you know, maybe back up a bit. I worked brief—well, I worked for a couple of years at Cumberland Daycare and then I got a job with the Youth Chance Society, which eventually morphed into Comox Valley Family Services much, much later. But I got hired to be sort of a family support worker, and my first day on the job, I had one-day overlap with the woman who was leaving the position. She said to me, 'I'm the shop steward, I'm leaving, you're going to have to be the shop steward.' So I said, 'Okay.' I had this idea that being a shop steward was, you know probably, unions were a good thing, not really knowing anything about them. So I said, 'Okay, I'll be the shop steward,' having no idea what I was getting into. It turned out that they were having a real fight for union recognition.

[00:15:03.23] - RM

What union was this?

[00:15:05.03] - AD

[BC]GEU. Yeah. The board of directors, because it was a non-profit, was very opposed to unionization. There was conflict within the staff group, which wasn't a very large group, but the majority were pro-union. But, you know, there were also other people who are saying, 'But we're professionals and professionals don't need unions,' the usual. So I kind of fell into this feet first, and before I knew it, I was appearing at the Labour Board because the board of directors said, 'We have no ability to decide what wages will be because it's the province that funds this.' The way it worked is that what's now the Ministry of Children and Family Development would give the organization a pot of money for so many hours for somebody to go and work with a family, right? So it was almost contract work flowed through this board of directors. So the board said, 'We don't have control over that, so in fact the province is the employer.' After GEU had gone several rounds with the employer on that, they said, 'Okay, we're going to the Labour Board to establish that the province is the employer.' So when you think about the implications, if they had won that case, it would have been massive right across the province for non-profits who had that model. So the first day we showed up at the Labour Board, it was me and the staff rep and a lawyer, John Rogers from Baigent & Rogers, or Baigent & Jackson.

[00:17:01.09] - RM

I know Baigent, I didn't know John Rogers.

[00:17:02.06] - AD

Yeah, okay. We show up and there's a wall of suits on the other side of the room, just this long line of men in suits, because the province is going to fight this, obviously. You know, it was really intimidating. I mean, I'm in my early 20s, right? Anyway, we lost, obviously, and had to go back to the employer, who then came into a staff meeting and just slagged the union and said, 'Anne, if you repeat a word of this to the union, we're coming after—I'm coming after you in the night.' This is from the chair of the board who lived right down the road from me. My husband at the time was away working. I'm living in this very wooded place, quite a bit remote, with my little baby. Husband's away. This guy lives right down the road. You know, I'm sure he wouldn't have literally come after me in the night, but it felt very threatening.

[00:18:04.09] - RM

Intimidating.

[00:18:05.13] - AD

So of course, as soon as the meeting was over, I went to the union office and wrote it all down, and there was an investigation. So it was quite an introduction to being in a union.

[00:18:18.05] - AD

I started that job in September, and in November I got a call from the staff rep asking if I wanted to go to the BC Fed. So that was my first experience of a Fed convention.

[00:18:34.00] - RM

Do you remember what year that was?

[00:18:35.25] - AD

It would have been, I think, 1980.

[00:18:40.10] - RM

That was Jim Kinnaird, I guess, was the president.

[00:18:42.12] - AD

Yeah, yeah. You know, again, I had such limited experience of unions, and my first morning of the Fed convention, I'm coming down in the elevator and these two guys get in the elevator, and they're Steelworkers, and they're big hefty guys in big Steelworker jackets, and they exactly fit my stereotype of union people, right? So, that's fine, and we go down. Later that day, one of those guys got up to a mic, and he talked about a fire in a daycare, I think in Trail, where some children had died.

[00:19:22.01] - RM

Oh my God.

[00:19:23.00] - AD

And he had tears in his eyes as he's talking. Then other people got up and talked about how there has to be 24-hour daycare because Trail runs 24-hours, and where do you think the

children are going to be, and it has to be licensed. It kind of blew my mind because what I understood from that experience was that unions weren't just about wages and working conditions. They were about so much more than that. So that—it was just a really great experience to be able to do that. I left that organization not long afterwards because I was having a difficult pregnancy, and they decertified after I left, which is very unfortunate, and they're still non-union to this day.

[00:20:12.04] - RM

Oh really? Decertification really hurts, doesn't it? You put in all that work and then they don't appreciate and don't know what they have.

[00:20:20.29] - AD

Yeah, yeah.

[00:20:22.24] - RM

So what happened after that?

[00:20:24.10] - AD

Oh, I was home —

[00:20:25.15] - RM

Was that a game changer, do you think, in your life, that BC Fed Convention?

[00:20:29.23] - AD

Yes, absolutely, absolutely. I mean, I had made friends in Cumberland with people who were very politically active. There was a very active Communist, small Communist Party contingent at that time in the valley. I was certainly, growing up I'd been exposed to kind of soft leftist ideas. I was exposed to even more in Cumberland and living in the Comox Valley. So yeah, yeah, it did. But that Fed Convention and that whole experience was really formative for me.

[00:21:13.00] - RM

So where did you go next? Is that—

[00:21:15.12] - AD

Well, I was home with my kids.

[00:21:16.28] - RM

Yeah, right.

[00:21:17.15] - AD

For several years, and then the Transition Society had formed because there was nowhere for women escaping violence to go in the Comox Valley. So they had formed and were trying to make the case to government that there had to be funding for a transition house. In the meantime, they set up a network of safe homes where private individuals would take women and kids into their homes and keep them safe. So I did that for a few years. It was a way to help out whilst—

[00:21:55.20] - RM

Was that as a volunteer?

[00:21:56.17] - AD

As a volunteer, yeah. It was a way to help out while still being at home with my kids, but contribute to that cause. That was really interesting and a real learning experience to house those families.

[00:22:13.21] - RM

Boy, that's worthy work.

[00:22:16.04] - AD

Yes. Yeah, it is worthy work. I'm very glad that funding was found for a transition house by 1992. I had expressed an interest in working with the kids in the house once the house opened, so I hired on when the house opened.

[00:22:39.25] - RM

When you say with the kids, who are you talking about?

[00:22:42.05] - AD

Children who were in residence in the transition house with their mothers. Yeah, yeah, because I had, you know, I had a past history of working with kids, but having sheltered moms and kids in my own home, I could really see the impact on those kids. I remember one time when one of my kids dropped a glass of milk, and the glass broke, and there's milk on the floor, and there's a woman and her children sitting around the table. I looked at those kids, and they literally all stopped breathing. They were just like, 'ah!' My husband at the time said to our child, 'Well, go get a towel and I'll help you clean it up.' And those kids were just like [frightened expression]—

[00:23:36.26] - RM

There wasn't an outburst.

[00:23:38.02] - AD

Nobody's screaming, nobody's hitting. So it was really clear to me that these were kids who had really big needs, and I wanted to work with them. So I was a child support worker in the transition house for a couple of years, and then I was asked if I would move up to managing the transition house, which I did for 10 years.

[00:24:02.18] - RM

And when you're working with the kids there, that was—was that a full-time job or still as a volunteer?

[00:24:07.11] - AD

Working with—no, working with the kids was a half-time job.

[00:24:10.13] - RM

Okay.

[00:24:11.06] - AD

Once I became the transition house coordinator, that was full-time. I started there at the very beginning of January 1993, and at some point in 1994, HSA, Health Sciences Association, sent a letter. They were doing an organizing drive in transition houses, and they sent a letter to the office of the Transition Society because they didn't have any contacts, so they just kind of a cold call. They sent a letter to the office saying that they were organizing, and our executive director at the time, Helen Dempster, wonderful woman. She opened the letter and read it, and she

came to our staff meeting and she said, 'This union wants to organize you, and I think you should consider it. It's in your best interest.' This was the boss. Yeah, yeah. So because I had been a [BC]GEU member, I said, 'Well, you know, GEU is a really good union, maybe we should look at them.' So we ended up having representatives of both unions come to a meeting together. They each made their pitch for their union. While I still have lots of respect for GEU, HSA's pitch was much better.

[00:25:35.22] - RM

In what way?

[00:25:37.05] - AD

They clearly had done their homework about transition houses and what the issues were, and they brought a woman from the Nanaimo Transition House, which they had already organized, to talk about her experience with HSA. So, you know, they were just far better prepared, and in the long run, I'm really glad that we went with HSA because HSA is really supportive of that tiny group of community social service workers, which includes transition houses, that are a very small part of the HSA union but get full-on attention from the union.

[00:26:17.07] - RM

You might have got even more swallowed up in the BCGEU.

[00:26:19.24] - AD

Yeah, I think so.

[00:26:21.11] - RM

Yeah. What was the workforce? How many people? What was your bargaining unit?

[00:26:26.09] - AD

Back then when we organized, it was 15.

[00:26:29.10] - RM

Well, that's a fair number.

[00:26:30.29] - AD

Yeah, today it's about 135.

[00:26:34.12] - RM

What? The Comox Valley Transition Society.

[00:26:37.15] - AD

Well, yeah, there's the transition house, there's counseling programs, there's housing.

[00:26:42.16] - RM

It's a big umbrella organization. Not just the transition house.

[00:26:44.05] - AD

Yeah, it has taken on much, much more, including a thrift store with the only unionized retail workers in downtown Courtenay who are making good wages, have benefits, and are working in a thrift store that's very, it's been very successful.

[00:27:05.21] - RM

Did you have anything to do with that?

[00:27:07.18] - AD

Not really, no.

[00:27:09.19] - RM

What union is it?

[00:27:10.18] - AD

Oh, it's HSA.

[00:27:12.08] - RM

Wow, that's amazing.

[00:27:13.17] - AD

These are all HSA members.

[00:27:15.03] - RM

Historic things happening.

[00:27:16.11] - AD

Yes. Yeah.

[00:27:18.07] - RM

All right, so there was no vote or anything, it was just a consensus that HSA—

[00:27:24.12] - AD

It was consensus in that meeting, and then of course we had to sign cards or whatever we did at that time.

[00:27:32.11] - RM

It wasn't fought by the employer, it wasn't resisted?

[00:27:35.09] - AD

Oh no, it was her suggestion.

[00:27:38.08] - RM

'I'll be very mad if you don't join the union.'

[00:27:41.23] - AD

So I've had two completely different experiences in organizing.

[00:27:48.05] - RM

So what were negotiations like? Did you have to negotiate with your employer, or was it province-wide?

[00:27:54.06] - AD

I think it was originally the employer, and then very shortly after that was—I'm trying to think of the name of the report that suggested that all these employers should be grouped together under—

[00:28:06.29] - RM

Into a bargaining association.

[00:28:08.20] - AD

Yeah. Yeah.

[00:28:10.26] - RM

Were you part of the negotiations though, and so on?

[00:28:15.26] - AD

No, no, I don't think so. This is kind of in the mists of time, but no. I don't think I was.

[00:28:23.22] - RM

Any strikes or strike votes over the years?

[00:28:28.02] - AD

Yeah, we went on strike in 1999.

[00:28:31.04] - RM

What was that like?

[00:28:33.18] - AD

Well, it was interesting. It was very interesting. It was an NDP government, so there was that. You know, you don't want to embarrass an NDP government, but at the same time, crappy wages are crappy wages and you've got to stand up for yourself, right? So the whole of community social services at that time was on strike across the province. We had seven weeks of rotating job action, so you'd get a call the night before to tell you you were going to be out picketing the next day. Then we had four weeks, I think it was basically the month of May that year, where we were out full-time. We had an executive director at that time who was really

hostile to us and to the union. There were a lot of issues going on in the organization. She had to provide us with a picket office, so she rented a hotel room in Campbell River [laughs] 45 minutes, an hour drive away, right? It was that kind of stuff was going on.

[00:29:44.29] - RM

Picayune stuff.

[00:29:46.12] - AD

Yeah. The community was supportive, the Labour Council was supportive, other union members came out and supported us. My van, because of the hotel room in Campbell River, my van became the office, basically. People would climb in it and turn the motor on for a while if they were freezing. The picket signs were loaded up in there every morning, every night, and unloaded in the morning. So we're parked in front of the employer's office in downtown Courtenay, and along comes the parking enforcement guy, and he says, 'You know you can't be there for more than two hours. I'm gonna have to ticket you.' One of my co-workers, Pat, she looked at him and she said, 'You used to be the Santa Claus at the transition house in Edmonton when I worked there.' And he said, 'Yes, I was!' They had this whole love fest going on, sharing memories about Christmases. Then he turned to us and he said, 'Don't worry about it, you park there as much as you want.' [laughs]

[00:31:00.02] - RM

That's a great story.

[00:31:02.08] - AD

It is a great story.

[00:31:04.01] - RM

It's a small world.

[00:31:05.11] - AD

Yes, yes.

[00:31:06.00] - RM

That is hilarious.

[00:31:07.14] - AD

Yeah, so we just parked there full-time, which really pissed off the executive director.

[00:31:15.20] - RM

But was that hard to be striking against, with vulnerable clients sort of, you know, at stake or whatever the word is?

[00:31:23.10] - AD

Okay, so the counseling programs shut down. The transition house, we had said to the union, 'The transition house has to keep going. Women will die if we don't keep it going.' So it ran on kind of a skeleton crew. I remember that staff said they wouldn't cook, so the executive director had to bring food in. She had to work, I think, 60 hours a week or something in the transition house. She made a point of telling us it was really easy, easiest thing she'd ever had.

[00:31:57.06] - RM

Exactly.

[00:31:58.17] - AD

Of course.

[00:31:59.11] - RM

Roll your eyes.

[00:32:02.05] - AD

We, because we were all really low paid, and now we're getting strike pay, which is even lower, we set up a schedule that allowed every one of us to rotate through the transition house and get at least a few hours at a slightly higher rate of pay. So, you know, we made sure those women were taken care of, and some of our clients would stop by the picket line and just hang out with us sometimes.

[00:32:29.02] - RM

How long was the strike?

[00:32:32.13] - AD

Well, the seven hours rotating—seven weeks rotating job action, four weeks full-on.

[00:32:38.29] - RM

Well, that's a long time.

[00:32:40.26] - AD

It is a long time, and it was feeling kind of hopeless for quite a while, but eventually the government caved. Yeah.

[00:32:50.29] - RM

And this was across the province?

[00:32:52.18] - AD

It was across the province, and we got the best contract we had ever had. You know, we had really substantial gains. That was 1999, and then the Gordon Campbell government was elected and we had stuff stripped out of our contract that, you know, just recently, just recently, I think a couple of years ago, we finally got fully-paid sick leave, like sick leave paid at 100 percent. We had that up, you know, through 19—through about 2001, we had that. It took over 20 years to get that back again. It was paid at 80 percent.

[00:33:37.17] - RM

So was there any fight back against what the Campbell government did, or did you just feel that you were helpless, or were you critical of the union for not opposing it more?

[00:33:49.21] - AD

No, there was definitely fight back. Like many communities, we organized locally and unions, union reps, people from different nonprofits and community groups came together. We had a coalition here that met regularly. I met Brian [Charlton] at the coalition meeting.

[00:34:15.06] - RM

One of those union things again.

[00:34:17.12] - AD

That's right. The rest is history there. One of the things that we did is—I think it was every Saturday afternoon, we picketed the MLA, BC Liberal MLA's office. The particular issue that we were going after there, and it was happening across the province, was around the government saying that people who are on disability, income assistance disability, were going to have to re-qualify, because the government was questioning whether all these people really had disabilities. There were actually suicides at that time of people who were so frightened of having to go through this and losing their disability payments. So that was the issue that we particularly focused on, and I know many other communities did, and we did win that. They backed off on that.

[00:35:15.27] - RM

I'm going to go back just a bit and, you know, I was going to ask you, 'What was it like organizing for the HSA?' But it sounded like the way it was, it was sort of a velvet road or something, 'sign here.' But what difference did the union make once you got represented by the HSA?

[00:35:31.29] - AD

So obviously that executive director, the first one, Helen, was great. We had three in a row after that who were not great, and so what the union did is it gave people protection. At one point, I had a target on my back because I was the person who was most vocal for the union in the workplace. Long complicated story which I won't get into, but I was sent home without pay for a day, and HSA got an expedited arbitration, and they were in there within two weeks and won it. I got paid for my day. So, you know, there was protection from the union. Probably even though our wages were crappy in those early years, they were better than they would have been, and we had benefits.

[00:36:34.04] - RM

You know, I often tell—or I don't, but I think, you know, when for union organizing, this, 'Oh, you'll get better wages.' Well, you don't always get better wages because employers will sometimes pay more to keep the union out. But it's the fact you have a right as an employee, like access to a grievance procedure, exactly what you were talking about. In some ways, that's almost worth more than the wages.

[00:36:59.11] - AD

Yes, and—

[00:36:59.19] - RM

And you can't be discriminated against.

[00:37:01.18] - AD

No, that's right. That's absolutely right. And health and safety.

[00:37:06.10] - RM

And health and safety. Absolutely. That's the other thing.

[00:37:07.24] - AD

Yes, yeah. Because, you know, the sector that I worked in, the nonprofits, you're really dependent on who's in charge, who's on the board, who's the executive director whether they give a damn about your safety in the workplace. With the union, you've got that support. You can take issues forward. You can refuse to do work that's unsafe.

[00:37:35.26] - RM

Now, you stayed there for a long time. What kept you there? You must have really believed in what you were doing and how much you help people. Can you talk about why you you stayed so long and what you were—what you saw as your role there and how you help people?

[00:37:53.28] - AD

Well, I was there for, I think, about 32 years.

[00:37:58.11] - RM

That's a long time.

[00:37:59.08] - AD

It's a long time these days, especially. I had a number of different roles over the years. After my 10 years as the transition house coordinator, I was coordinating, managing other programs, but I was becoming more and more kind of a resource person for all the programs and really

involved in community coordination. So where you bring together RCMP, the justice system people, the social services. You get them all in one room once a month, share information, build relationships, because that's going to help keep women and kids safer. The work really mattered to me. When I was growing up, I never encountered intimate partner violence in my family or any of the homes I ever visited. I was never aware of that, and it was kind of a big shock to me as—in my early 20s, mid-20s, to kind of discover that this—how big an issue it—not just that it's an issue, but how big. For me, it was always a social justice issue. Obviously a women's issue. It's very much a men's issue too, but we know we don't talk about that as much, right?

[00:39:27.20] - AD

That we need to get men a lot more involved than they are now. So it was really important work to me, and there were places where I could see opportunities to expand how we were doing the work. So, in the early-mid-'90s, there was a lot of fear around women with HIV/AIDS coming into transition houses. And, 'Oh my God, what if they touch something and I touch them.' So just the ability to take a lead on getting some solid information and persuading people that, 'Let's just assume that everybody potentially has HIV/AIDS, so let's all be safe and use universal precautions, and then we don't have to worry about it.' We had always had people come into the transition house where you kind of look at them and think, 'Huh,' but it wasn't until kind of the mid to late '90s that we started to name that, 'Oh, we're getting trans women actually, we always have. We just, you know, maybe we didn't name it, but we've always had trans women. So what do we need to do around educating our staff to make sure that we're appropriately supporting trans women.' Just a little sideline there—

[00:40:56.26] - RM

Was that a split?

[00:40:57.29] - AD

Was that a split?

[00:40:59.10] - RM

Was there a split over that issue? Because, you know, the controversy in Vancouver with rape relief and so on—

[00:41:05.01] - AD

Rape relief?

[00:41:06.14] - RM

Anyway, you know the split.

[00:41:07.23] - AD

Yeah.

[00:41:08.00] - RM

Was there any of that that you had to confront?

[00:41:11.12] - AD

Not hardline, but concerns. So what do you do? You bring in education, you bring in some trans women to talk about their experiences, do some myth-busting. Over, I don't know how many, however many years the Transition House has been going now since '92, the only time that I'm aware of that a trans woman was asked to leave was she had really quite serious mental health issues that were impacting other people. The biggest issues for trans women in the house was nosy—other people who were nosy and asking inappropriate questions. That was what the staff really had to deal with, was setting up some barriers, right? So yeah, so the work really mattered to me, and the possibilities of working within the labour movement, of the labour movement and the women's movement working together, that was really obvious. Obviously that work was already happening in many ways, but I could really see it around violence against women. I got myself elected to the board of HSA in 2011 as the regional director representing our members north of the Malahat. The convention where I start—the HSA convention where I started my first term was the convention that established a women's committee.

[00:42:48.05] - AD

So I got to chair the very first women's committee, and I was involved with the women's committee all the way through my years on the board. We did a lot of education around intimate partner violence, around developing women's leadership. When Leila Lolua was the staff rep in HSA who was assigned to that first women's committee, and she and I sat down one day to write the terms of reference, and we looked at each other and she said, 'We don't really have to spell out that it's just for women, do we?' I said, 'Maybe we'd better.' [laughs] So we took the terms of reference to the board and got huge push back that it shouldn't just be for women. I had very nice men on the board who were very supportive say, 'But you know, supportive men

could really have a role in the women's committee.' That was my first fight on the board of directors, and I won.

[00:43:52.26] - RM

Because I was going to ask you whether there was any fight back. I mean, 2011 though, whenever it was— was it 2011? That seems awfully late to be having a women's committee.

[00:44:02.10] - AD

HSA was very late to have a women's committee. Anyway, we did really good work on that committee.

[00:44:09.18] - RM

I was going to ask you whether it made a difference.

[00:44:11.08] - AD

Yeah, I think so, a lot. We did a lot of development of women's leadership, and I think that made a big difference to women who were thinking about being a Chief Steward at a big site or thinking about running to be a Regional Director. I was able to represent HSA on the BC Fed Women's Rights Committee and on NUPGE's [National Union of Provincial Government Employees] our national union's Women's Advisory Committee, go to Ottawa regularly and be part of that committee. My platform was always around intimate partner violence and how important it is, and I did eventually train to be a trainer in the Domestic Violence in the Workplace program through the CLC. I could just really see that the labour movement had the ability to move forward a lot of issues that we were working with in our sector.

[00:45:09.12] - RM

We've come a long way since, Van East, the MP that was laughed at in the House of Commons.

[00:45:16.02] - AD

Yes, Margaret Mitchell.

[00:45:17.15] - RM

Margaret, the lovely Margaret Mitchell, when she talked about wife beating or whatever and was laughed at. I think we've come a ways since then.

[00:45:25.22] - AD

Yeah, we certainly have.

[00:45:27.19] - RM

And you have been part of it.

[00:45:29.10] - AD

Yeah, and I've been proud to be part of it, along with some other really great people.

[00:45:34.21] - RM

That's great. Now, but you also got involved in the Labour Council.

[00:45:38.00] - AD

Yes.

[00:45:38.21] - RM

So could you talk about that?

[00:45:42.08] - AD

Well, I started attending off and on. At one point I moved over to Denman Island. I was living there.

[00:45:53.22] - RM

Still a hippie?

[00:45:55.24] - AD

Yeah, pretty much. [laughs] Anyway, I was living on Denman and I would occasionally attend Labour Council in town, but it meant spending the night in town, so, you know, I wasn't there very often. But when I moved back into Courtenay in 2001, I started attending Labour Council regularly as an HSA delegate, and I think I barely spoke for about three or four years because I

was, you know, the Robert's Rules or whatever is being used. Advice to Labour Council, get rid of them or train people up in how to use them because it's a great way to turn off new delegates, right? Anyway, I kept coming, and yeah, I was involved in the Labour Council as an HSA delegate until I retired last year, and now I'm a BC FORUM [BC Federation of Retired Union Members] delegate. I was president of the Labour Council for a couple of years, and I think I held every position on the executive except treasurer.

[00:47:01.14] - RM

So when were you elected president?

[00:47:06.19] - AD

I think it might have been 2010 to 2012, something like that.

[00:47:10.21] - RM

Just there two or three years?

[00:47:12.19] - AD

Yeah.

[00:47:13.23] - RM

Were you the first woman to hold that job?

[00:47:16.03] - AD

No, no, no. Marianne Bell had been president for quite a while at some point before me.

[00:47:24.20] - RM

Were there any specific issues that the labour council focused on or got involved in or something like that? Do you remember?

[00:47:35.25] - AD

Well, we were always a small but mighty labour council. Certainly we showed up and supported strikes that were happening. BC Liberals, we would have been involved in pushing back against

them. Yeah, nothing really stands up for me. Except the labour council, I'm proud to say, has been involved in organizing, with the Cumberland Museum, Miners Memorial every year.

[00:48:10.09] - RM

Yeah, great.

[00:48:10.29] - AD

Yeah.

[00:48:12.09] - RM

Obviously you've lived here a long time and you've seen the workforce change.

[00:48:18.12] - AD

Yes.

[00:48:18.23] - RM

Because one would assume that the— for instance, the Labour Council would have been dominated by industrial union delegates and so on, with the pulp mill and all the sawmills and so on. Can you talk a bit about the change that you've seen and the impact on the Island and unions?

[00:48:36.01] - AD

Yeah, when the Elk Falls mill closed, that had a big impact on our labour council because some of those guys had been in the executive positions on the council. That was a really large membership, probably the biggest employer, and we lost a lot of money, a lot of funding when they left. So that was hard. Field sawmill closed. That was— those were Steelworkers. Yeah, there was definitely—there's definitely been a change. The Labour Council currently is in a bit of a slump, but I think just starting to be on the upside.

[00:49:18.17] - RM

Is it mostly public sector unions now?

[00:49:19.26] - AD

Mostly public sector. Yeah.

[00:49:22.25] - RM

Do you have a full-time staffer, or is it all volunteer?

[00:49:27.15] - AD

It's pretty well volunteer. I think the president now gets a paid day a month, something like that, to kind of carry out business, and I think the treasurer gets a few hours, but that's about it.

[00:49:41.06] - RM

You retired finally.

[00:49:43.11] - AD

Yes.

[00:49:45.04] - RM

Was that a hard decision?

[00:49:47.14] - AD

Not really. I mean, I think one of the hard—I felt very ready to leave the work. The organization was in a really good place. I felt I had done good work and it was going to carry on. I felt good about the organization. Leaving the union is in some ways harder.

[00:50:09.01] - RM

But you say you've stayed involved in the union somehow, or just BC FORUM you're talking about?

[00:50:14.11] - AD

Yeah, just BC FORUM.

[00:50:16.15] - RM

And you're also on the board of the Island Health Authority.

[00:50:19.13] - AD

I am.

[00:50:20.12] - RM

So what's that been like? Do you represent unions on the Island Health?

[00:50:27.15] - AD

So when—

[00:50:28.16] - RM

Or you bring a union point of view?

[00:50:31.00] - AD

Well, I certainly bring a union point of view. When the Horgan government was elected and they changed up the membership of a lot of the boards and commissions, apparently they wanted somebody from labour on every Health Authority board, so the Fed put my name forward for Island Health. And huge learning curve. Wow. I mean, just the size and complexity of the organization, the amount of money that's involved, the number of people that are involved. I think what I've brought to that board is the labour perspective, but also the kind of front line perspective. I've worked a lot with people who are up against it, whether it's violence or poverty or homelessness or addiction. You know, I know those folks and I know what their issues are, and being able to bring that perspective to the board sometimes is—it's important to put, to put a human face sometimes on, you know, some big things that we're talking about. A few years back, Leah Hollins, the board chair, phoned me and said, 'You know, the person who's headed up—been heading up the Human Resources Committee, her term is over. You know, I'd like you to do it. You'd be perfect because you come from labour.' [laughs]

[00:51:54.04] - RM

You know how to keep those workers down.

[00:51:57.18] - AD

I said, 'Well, yeah, I come from labour, which is kind of the other side of the table.' But yeah, it's been good. It's been really good.

[00:52:06.29] - RM

Are you still doing it?

[00:52:08.01] - AD

Yeah.

[00:52:08.20] - RM

Wow, that's great.

[00:52:09.23] - AD

Yeah, yeah. My term finally ends at the end of this year. It'll have been eight years.

[00:52:14.18] - RM

Because, boy, the issues are sure a lot different than they used to be and as you point out, the complexity of them.

[00:52:21.22] - AD

Yeah.

[00:52:23.16] - RM

You must feel like throwing up your hands sometimes, although you don't seem like that kind of person.

[00:52:29.18] - AD

No, no, it is really complex, and there's so much focus on doctors and nurses, and of course, coming from HSA, I would be putting up my hand fairly regularly saying, 'And health science professionals.' But also, you know, the cooks, the cleaners, the maintenance people, right? They're the backbone, and we must not forget them when we're talking about the organization and what it takes to run the organization.

[00:52:58.23] - RM

Are you still a community activist? Are you involved in issues?

[00:53:04.14] - AD

Am I involved in issues? I was asked to go on the board of Transition Society, and I did briefly, and then needed to back off because the meetings conflicted with Island Health meetings, but I'm to go back on in January, so I'll stay involved there. No, and if stuff comes up, if we get another bad government, you know, I'll be there.

[00:53:27.18] - RM

Well, we've got one. Oh, wait a minute, sorry, [laughs] we'll take that out. Oh man, anyway, are you still involved with the Miners Memorial Weekend?

[00:53:42.24] - AD

Yes.

[00:53:43.17] - RM

Could you talk a bit about that and why you think it's important?

[00:53:47.06] - AD

Because our history matters. Our history really matters, and we need to know our history, and we need to know what people went through in the past, and we need to take inspiration from that, and we need to celebrate the activism that continues. So at Miners Memorial, we're talking about Ginger Goodwin, we might be talking about Joe Naylor, we're talking about the Chinese, the Japanese communities. We're including all of that, but we always bring in people who are struggling with something today. So whether it's somebody internationally, like Mexican miners were there one year, we've had people from Chile, or whether it's, for instance, this year the postal workers informing people about their issues. We're always looking for what are the current issues that we need to be holding up as we celebrate the people of the past.

[00:54:45.25] - RM

Do you find it's a tough slog because young people don't know any of this history?

[00:54:50.09] - AD

It is kind of a tough slog, but when you have an opportunity to share it with people, they—I mean, the stories are great, right?

[00:54:59.05] - RM

They are great.

[00:55:00.01] - AD

They're great stories. They're really interesting, and I think you can hook people.

[00:55:05.27] - RM

Can I ask you about your daughter?

[00:55:10.05] - AD

Okay.

[00:55:11.02] - RM

Is she a poster child for home-schooling? Because I gather she was— we're talking about Emily St. John Mandel.

[00:55:19.26] - AD

Yes, that's correct.

[00:55:21.07] - RM

She home-schooled until Grade 12.

[00:55:23.27] - AD

Yeah, yeah, she needed to get her Grade 12 certificate, so we got an appointment with this alternate program which was mostly for kids who weren't doing well in school behaviourally or whatever, where they could be continuing their learning, small, individually, but they could show up at this place and there were teachers to help them. So we came in for an interview and the teacher said to her, 'You know, you have to have been out of school for at least three months to be in this program,' and she said, 'I've been out of school my whole life.' But she's a smart kid, she's a talented kid, she's done wonderful things.

[00:56:07.21] - RM

Did you home-school your other kids?

[00:56:10.15] - AD

Not for as long as Emily because my first marriage ended and that was the point where I needed to go from part-time child support worker to full-time transition house coordinator. So the kids went to school at that point. So I think at that point they went into Grade 5, 4, and 2. Yeah.

[00:56:34.23] - RM

Is that when your marriage broke up?

[00:56:36.15] - AD

Yeah.

[00:56:36.23] - RM

The only reason I ask that is, I mean, so you were a single mom with young kids.

[00:56:42.04] - AD

Oh yeah.

[00:56:42.20] - RM

So what kind of a struggle was that? And you're still having—was there enough support for you?

[00:56:48.16] - AD

It was a struggle. After a few years, my former husband kind of wandered off, so yeah, I was very much a single parent. Yeah, I'm really proud of my kids. They've done really well.

[00:57:05.24] - RM

Plaudits to you?

[00:57:07.13] - AD

Well, and to them.

[00:57:08.19] - RM

And to them, of course.

[00:57:09.27] - AD

Yes. I think when you grow up in a single-parent household without a lot of money, you have to be resourceful and you have to be hardworking to get ahead, right? And they've all done that, so I'm really proud of them.

[00:57:24.20] - RM

Well, this has been great, and I will ask you, is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Anything we missed, or memorable characters you've come across in the union movement?

[00:57:34.29] - AD

There have been many memorable characters.

[00:57:38.20] - RM

Anyone who had a real influence on you, do you think?

[00:57:42.02] - AD

You know, something I would say is through my life there have been points, you know, pivotal moments where a woman has tapped me on the back and said, 'You should do this, you could do that,' and I thought, 'Me? Okay.' I've made a point of doing that for other women, but I'm really appreciative of the women who've done that. Suzanne Bennett, who was the regional director before me, she took me out for coffee and said, 'You need to be a regional director.' Val Avery, who put my name forward for the Island Health Board, put my name forward to the BC Fed. Like, I just really appreciate those women who have really been so supportive.

[00:58:28.22] - RM

And your mom.

[00:58:29.25] - AD

And my mom, yeah.

[00:58:32.17] - RM

Great. She must have been very proud of you.

[00:58:36.05] - AD

Yep, I hope so. I think she probably tore her hair out a few times too.

[00:58:45.21] - RM

So you were one of those few hippies that came to the Comox Valley and stayed.

[00:58:49.26] - AD

Yeah, oh, there's quite a few of us actually.

[00:58:53.00] - RM

Back to the land.

[00:58:54.01] - AD

Uh-huh.

[00:58:54.28] - RM

All right, that's great. Thank you, that was wonderful.

[00:58:57.25] - AD

Oh, thank you.

[00:58:58.12] - RM

Great to get to know you.

[00:59:00.00] - AD

That was fun.