

EB: I came to Canada when I was seven years old. And I think I've broke bread in every province except the Maritimes. We came to Winnipeg and we stayed there for a matter of two months, then we moved to Saskatchewan. One year after we arrived, the rest of my family arrived. And we bought a farm, which we farmed for two years. Then my father moved to Medicine Hat, and the family sold the farm and followed. We stayed there from nineteen eight until 1910. And then my father/was fed up with the Prairies, and he came to Vancouver. Where he worked at Powell River in the starting of the mill there. In September of 1910, he brought my mother, my younger brother and myself to Vancouver.

SD: He had gone on ahead to make some money?

EB: Yes. Then, in 1914, I quit school and I went to work for the telephone office. I was underage but I worked for three months on the switchboard, till they found out my age and I was laid off.

SD: Did you go to work because your family needed your income?

EB: My mother had a very serious operation in 1911. At that time my father was only making \$2 for a 10-hour day on the city of Vancouver. He was a carpenter with fullkit. And the hospital expenses and doctors and things like that, and I really should not have quit school but it was just, next door to us lived three girls that was

EB: (cont) operators, and they learnt the book to me before I went to work and they thought I was very smart because I knew everything. Actually it was all I had to learn was the actual switchboard and the operation of it. So after I was laid off, my father, his ambition was for me to go to university. But with money conditions at home, I didn't want to go. For which I'm sorry. So my father said I would either go back to school or go back to work. So I got a job in the Pioneer Laundry.

SD: What were the conditions like there?

EB: We worked ten hours a day, sometimes 60 hours a week. For the large sum of \$7 a week. We had these conditions up until, ^{from} 1914 till 1918, when we decided to form a union.

SD: Was it mostly young women who worked there?

EB: A variation. In the department that I was in, mostly young women. But on the pressing and the ironing it was middle-aged women.

SD: What exactly were you doing in the laundry?

EB: I was head folder on the machines.

SD: It must have been really hot, hard work.

EB: It was. And, you know, in those days, we didn't wear the loose clothing that we do now, and we wore undergarments, which was always starched, and a starched

EB: (cont) uniform.

SD: It must have been horrible in the summer.

EB: In May of 1918, we decided to form our union. We set our wages at \$13.95. -- Come in --

PAUSE.

SD: To return, you began to organize in 1914?

EB: In May.

SD: And how many people were involved in the initial organizing, and what prompted people to organize a union?

EB: Well, I think the conditions, the wages, and the hours.

SD: How did people find out about unionism?

EB: We had one driver, by the name of Victor Midgely, who was a driver. And he, with about 10 or 12 of us, talked it over. Which I relayed to my father, who advised me to go ahead.

SD: So you came from a pro-union family?

EB: Yes.

SD: Were other women there involved in the initial setting-up of the organizing?

EB: Yes, but I can't remember all their names. One woman that did help us a lot was Helena Gutteridge. She helped us a lot.

SD: Was she a delegate at that time to the Trades and Labor Council?

EB: I think she was more of in the secretarial work. She was secretary to the Engineers. And their president was

EB: (cont) Mr. Alexander. You know this is a long way to go back (laughs).

SD: Did you know a Mrs. Henderson or a Miss Loney?

EB: No.

SD: They were from slightly earlier, I wondered if they were still in the laundries then.

EB: No. After about 1930, I more or less dropped my union, because I was in different work.

SD: Right, for the CCF.

EB: Um . . .

SD: So you began to organize in 1914. How did you organize, did you set up a committee?

EB: We set up a meeting. With some of the delegates, or officials, of different unions, the Shipbuilders, the Engineers. They came and more or less gave us a summary of what we could expect and what we would go for. And it was unanimous vote. I think there was about 250 men and women there, because we had men working that was washers, like, in the washer room. During the summer, there was a general strike, 24-hour strike called, but we were not called out because we were too young, in unionism. They didn't think we'd do any good coming out to it, like. The Shipbuilders and Teamsters and men like that was the ones that really brought the power. Then we decided to strike on Labor Day. With

EB: (cont) our object of \$13.95.

SD: This was in 1918?

EB: Yes: We called our strike off on January 1, 1919.

SD: So you were out for three months?

EB: Yes. In October of 1918, a union laundry was formed called the Excelsior. I went in as head folder. And we contributed so much out of our pay for the strikers.

SD: So it was like a cooperative that was set up in order to aid the . . .

EB: Yes. The various unions in Vancouver donated and we received \$7 a week, strike pay.

SD: Did people picket?

EB: Oh, yes, we picketed every laundry, with great assistance from the Longshoremen.

SD: Did you use that as a way of signing up other people into the union?

EB: Yes. During 1918 the flu epidemic was on, and a full-page advertisement came out in the papers that the flu epidemic was not easing up owing to the laundry workers being on strike, with dirty linen. So, the unions run an ad stating that we would man any laundry free of wages, 24 hours a day, for people with the flu in their home. Which we received no response for. We wanted to man a general hospital, which was working their 10 hours a day, we wanted to go in and finish the 24 hours a day,

EB: (cont) to keep the hospitals sanitary. But there was no response to it. I did have that paper for years until it began to crumble and I had to throw it away. I kept it as a souvenir. In January of 1919, we declared our strike off. We had lost our strike, but we brought pressure to the government. During the latter months of 1918, they were forming the minimum wage board^s. And they took \$13.95 as their goal for laundry workers and factory workers.

SD: Who was on the minimum wage board?

EB: I can't remember.

SD: Less names than components, were the unions on it, was it a government . . .

EB: It was a government thing, and I think they did have some of the union representatives on it, most likely somebody from the Trades and Labor Councils, you know, someone that was interested in all unions. So though we had lost our strike, we had gained in many ways, because there was many industries and workers who were working for very small wages, ewrappers in Woodward's were getting \$4 a week. So our next object was to go out and get the minimum wage for the lesser wage earners. Which I think came up to \$12 a week, around that. For store clerks, store clerks were only getting \$5 or \$6 a week. We also then went out to organize and to bring

EB: (cont) women that belonged to the unions towards the front to take a more active part in it.

SD: How did you do that? What kind of campaign did you use. . .

EB: Well, we attended their meetings, the Tailors and the Tailoresses, we went to the meeting and met the women and more or less brought them out that they could do something in the labor movement. Which did help.

SD: What kind of goals did you have? Did you want to see women get active as leaders of the unions, or just get active in terms of more militancy within your union, were there specific women's issues, like the minimum wage, that you felt they could fight for?

EB: Well, in those days, a woman did not take a prominent outlook on life of competing with men. We were more or less subservient. But we did help in any way that we could. Now I'm not sure whether it was 1919 or 1920, it was around that time, but the telephone operators were becoming, and feeling that they were not getting what they should. The telephone office in those days was known by a name. The main office was Seymour. And I think there was four other exchanges, by names. Fairmont was one and Kerrisdale was another, and . . . So we assisted them there and Seymour struck. Seymour went on strike. Which was the main office, it was all the businesses and various things. That was where I went.

EB: (cont) And we put on two dances. One which we made about \$500 at, which we turned over to help the striking telephone operators.

SD: That's a lot of money in those days.

EB: It was when you considered you paid 50¢ for a dance, you know what I mean.

SD: Was that at the O'Brian^{ca} hall, by any chance?

EB: No, we held one in the O'Brian^{ca}, and we held one in the Dominion. The Dominion was on, the O'Brian was on the corner of Hastings and Homer, and the Dominion was in the middle of the block between Homer and Hamilton. But our halls was packed.

SD: Yeah, there must have been at least a thousand people there.

EB: Well, no, the halls were not that big. We had five hundred -- it was so crowded you couldn't dance, you know. But a lot of it was sympathy. People had bought tickets to help the telephone operators out.

SD: And were they striking around similar issues that the laundry workers went out around, wages and working conditions and hours of work?

EB: Yes. They worked long hours too, the telephone operators. You see, most of the, I don't think the telephone operators worked any more than 48 hours, where we worked 60. But that was long hours. And they were on call if

EB: (cont)an operator, three or four operators was off, and it was your day off, you were called in.

SD: Did the telephone operators have a separate local of the union at that time? Like just the women operators, or were they part of the . . .

EB: No, I think it was just a general. After that, ^{things} seemed to go a long way, we helped organize different . . . we organized the canneries.

SD: Was that the fish canneries, or vegetable . . .

EB: Fish canneries and . . . all canneries. Then I more or less dropped out of union work and I worked up till 19 -- let's see, about 1939, when the war started.

SD: Can I ask you some more questions about that . . .

EB: Yes.

SD: Were you, it sounds like some of the organizing you were doing was, in fact, industrial organizing.

EB: Yes.

SD: Now what kinds of attitudes were there between the craft unions and those who tended to support craft unionism, and those who would support organizing essentially unskilled low-paid workers, like laundry workers, telephone work^res, and so on. Were there conflicts?

EB: No. No, in those days, if you could get a union going to help, it didn't matter whether you were an educated person, or a lower-paid . . . The support went out

EB: (cont) from everybody. You supported everybody that was trying to get a union going.

SD: What kind of positions did you hold in your union? Were you on the executive, were you ^a shop steward?

EB: I was shop steward in the Excelsior, and I was forelady for about 12 years.

SD: And were you on the union executive?

EB: Yes.

SD: Were there other women on the executive?

EB: Yes.

SD: And were there men and women on the executive?

EB: Yes.

SD: How did people see women being in leadership positions in the union? What kind of attitudes were there towards that? Did people have trust in women's abilities?

EB: A lot depended on the gender in the unions. If it was strongly a woman's union, like the Laundry workers, that. But if it was in the position where the membership was par, they just took just an ordinary position or if they were brilliant, they stepped up, you know, in it. And in 1939, I quit.

SD: You'd continued to work in the labor movement through that whole period of time?

EB: Well, more/or less, yes. But in 1939 I quit and stayed home a month. The war was on and I felt I had to go

EB: (cont) back to work. So I applied for a position in the Canada Packer fish packers. (Laughs.)

SD: So you became a cannery worker?

EB: Yes. When I applied, I went down to the head office on Campbell Avenue, and the lady said to me, I think you have the ability of being a forelady. So I applied for the job of forelady, at the Steveston ^{can-} nery. I had to see a gentleman by the name of Mr. Lee, who I thought might be Scotch but he was a tall, Chinese chap. And he was almost horrified at me applying for this position.

SD: Why?

EB: He didn't ^{think} that I would fit into it. I stated that I knew nothing about it, I would have to work for a week, till I would know what was expected of me in correcting the girls or . . . I worked for three days, and he asked me how I would like to go in as mother to the boarders. They had a boardinghouse out there and they wanted somebody to look after it, more or less a mother type. I forget what my wages was going to be but they were fabulous to what I had received in my life, so I accepted. Mr. Lee was very, he as he was leaving the factory he said he couldn't see me going around with an apron and gumboots on, but somebody had told me to go to the CPA Repair Depot, and apply for a job as matron. Which I thought would be better because in Steveson it meant that I was away

EB: (cont) from my home, I had little time off, and when I did it was a long way to come into Vancouver?

SD: Did you have children then?

EB: I wasn't married. So I went down and applied for the job. Mr. Thompson the personnel manager immediately accepted me. When I went down to apply to the Unemployment, they refused on account of my age, I was in my early '40's. So I went back and he went round and told them whether they liked it or not he was taking me on. So I started with the CPA Repair Depot.

SD: Did the, because it was during the war, were you refused the job by unemployment because of the Selective Service regulations ? . .

EB: Yes, it was the Selective Service. At that time they only had one shift on, so Mr. Thompson asked me if I would work in the plant until the shifts were organized. And I said yes. I went into the paint shop. I had the big job of going around the rivets with a paring knife, for two days. Then I went in as a matron, on the afternoon shift.

SD: What did a matron do?

EB: The matrons was to see that the girls did not smoke, that they had their turbans on before they came out of the washroom, that they did not loiter in the washrooms. If a girl was sick you took her out to the hospital. Any-

EB: (cont) thing pertaining to the welfare of a female employee.

SD: And were those workers organized?.

EB: I don't think so. The riveters and that, they may have been.

SD: How long were you there?

EB: From 1940 until 1946.

SD: So during that period of time of the war were ^{there} or-
ganizing attempts? That was the time when the CCL was growing.

EB: Oh yes, yes. In 1943 I married. And I worked one year, I think it, 19---, I left there in 19---,

SD: 46?

EB: No, I left there in 1945. When I left my husband considered that I should be home. So I quit and I could not get unemployment insurance because I had quit.

SD: That was 1945?

EB: Yes. And from then on my life became more or less dormant to activities of the outside. I worked in any organization that I could help, but for the benefit of others.

SD: And were you active in the CCF?

EB: Yes.

SD: During that war period, what kind of organizing drives were there at the CPA? Was it an industrial union drive?

EB: Yes.

SD: Were you involved with that?

EB: No.

SD: Could you describe the drive?

EB: Well, it was so long ago that, and actually it was more or less a quiet drive. Their mechanics, of course, was organized.

SD: How about the women working on the shop floor, were they part of that union drive, were they signed up?

EB: I just can't. . . I think they were.

SD: How did . . .

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SD: How did people see the women who were working there, in the industrial situation, were they seen primarily as temporary workers who'd come in for ^{war} industry, or had they been there before the war?

EB: No, this was just, the CPA Repair Depot was organized at the beginning of the war.

SD: So it was particularly a war industry?

EB: Yes.

SD: And did it collapse after the war was over?

EB: No it went ahead, then they closed down. We was situated in Boeing's area, in fact, on their grounds.

SD: I know there were quite a few Boeing workers who were women . . .

EB: Yes.

SD: And who in fact were involved with the union.

EB: Yes. Boeing's had a place on Pender street, too, down near the park, but it was just a small repair.

SD: Earlier, before the war, were you involved at all in the unemployed struggle?

EB: No. Our union laundry had more or less gone dead.

SD: When was that?

EB: Oh, I would imagine it started in the . . . more or less in the Depression days?

SD: Was that Excelsior?

EB: No, the Excelsior went broke.

SD: And then the union laundry that you had been working at, that was organized?

EB: Yes, yes. So that more or less took the union away, when that went broke, the other unions were not organized. And that's why we began to go down, but I think they have now a very strong union.

SD: In that early period of, I guess, 1918-1919, who did the organizing? Were political organizations, such as the Socialist Party, or other Socialist forces, involved in organizing workers? Or were the Wobblies involved?

EB: No, no, they weren't.

SD: What was the political spectrum of the trade union movement then, were people in support of the Liberal Party?

EB: Yes, I think the old parties was quite strong then, but, the Socialist movement was starting.

SD: How were those early unions structured? Were there elected shop stewards?

EB: Yes.

SD: And when people were organizing, did people come in and teach you how to organize a union, what kind of structures to create?

EB: We always had somebody from a stronger union, mostly male, that would come in and sit in on our meetings. And then if we proposed something that they didn't

EB: (cont) think was right or if we could do it a better way, they would get up and speak to us, and advise us.

SD: What kind of impact did that have on the workers, to have someone . . .'

EB: I think it had a lot to do with that, because they felt that they were learning something, and they were also bettering themselves.

SD: Did Helena Gutteridge do that too, come in and sit in?

EB: Yes, she used to come in and sit in on it. The Excelsior Laundry was only half a block down the lane from the Trades and Labor Council building.

SD: Was that the Labor Temple?

EB: Well, it's taken over now by the Human Resources for the Old Age. It's on the corner of Dunsmuir and Homer. And if we had any difficulties I would run up on my noon hour, and if there was a little fuss going to start for something like that I would go up and talk to one of the, well if I could get hold of a, the Engineer representative for the Teamsters, and they would more or less advise me on it.

SD: You were a delegate to the Trades and Labor Council?

EB: Yes.

SD: Can you talk about how you became a delegate and what kind of work you did as a delegate, and also what kind of attitudes there were towards you as one of the first

SD: (cont) women who did that?

EB: Well, I took the part of more, of, fighting for the women.

The unions for women.

^{Star:}
SR: Did the women have special problems that you could deal with, like what about the married women with children? Did they . . .

EB: In those days, you found very little women working with children. If a woman had her family grown she would come back to work. Or if misfortune hit her that she had to come back to work, that was a big . . . because there was no social assistance or anything like that in those days. It was just, you got out and helped yourself or else you starved.

SD: So that meant that childcare was not a major issue?

EB: Oh, no. No. Of course in those days, you didn't have the outside attractions. Your home was . . . well, it really meant something to you. You didn't go out on parties, you didn't take summer holidays, if you did it was just a couple of days and a tent someplace. So that actually, the women were more to their home than they are now.

SD: So that must have made it more difficult for women to work?

EB: Yes it was, yes.

SD: What kinds of attitudes were there towards women who worked? Was society hostile toward them?

EB: No, if a person had to go to work, through misfortune or anything like that, they were helped, you know what I mean, they weren't saying, "Oh, she's just come out because she wants to buy herself a new dress," or something like that, no, there was sympathy for the person who had to go, a woman, who had to go out and work. Especially after a certain age. The general public in those days that a woman was giving something to the world in being a good wife and a good mother, and if she did that she was contributing her, she was contributing to the efforts of the world of making it a better place.

SD: Did single working women tend to live with their parents, their families, or did they live, did they have their own apartments or . . .

EB: If they had their parents here, they lived at home. But during the war, we had a lot of the ^{young} women come up from the Prairies . . .

SD: The Second World War?

EB: No, the First World War. And with that, they had a room, a housekeeping room or something like that. But the majority of young people lived with their families, in those days. During the Second World War why, that was

EB: (cont) a common thing, to get out on your own. It was beginning the starting of it then.

SD: What happened to women after the First World War, were many women brought into industry during the First World War and then ^{later} laid off?

EB: Yes. Laid off, when the industries more or less closed down, like, you see why.

SD: And what kind of reaction was there to that by the women?

EB: Well I think we, we took it as a natural thing. The jobs that a woman went in to do, were being closed out. So they just took it natural that they, they weren't being uh, what's the word, they weren't being separated away from labor, it was just that the conditions was that way.

SD: This is the story of an event that took place during the Laundry Workers' strike.

EB: It's just come to my mind that, the injustice of some of our courts. An event happened with a girl that worked in one of the laundries, and she walked with a limp. One evening she was coming down Richard Street when some of the picketers met her and they started to holler and carry on. And she ran up the steps and into the Holy Rosary. Amongst the picketers was a driver, a laundry driver. He went up about four steps and

EB: (cont) tried to quiet them down. But, he was taken in and he was given two years, because the court claimed that he had crippled this girl, by chasing her. So this driver, I can't remember his name, spent two years for something that was uncalled for. But the Laundry Workers did stand by him and for the two years that he was in jail, they gave him a laundry driver's union wages. One thing is that justice is not always given where it should be.

SD: The press distorted the story of what happened, did they?

EB: Yes, uhm. They claimed that he had chased this girl and she had stumbled, and in some way she had hurt her ankle. And of course she played on it. And of course he was sent because he was supposed to be the ringleader in this here group of picketers.

SD: And you were saying before that all the few people of the Excelsior came out and watched what was happening?

EB: Yes, yes. When we heard about it, we were only half a block from the Holy Rosary, we went up the lane and watched. But the girl did not come out of the Holy Rosary for an hour. In the meantime the crowd had dispersed and that.

SD: So despite the fact that you were there, your testimony wasn't taken in court?

EB: Oh no, oh no.

SD: The courts generally were quite anti-labor then. Are there other stories that you can think of, were they?

EB: We had very little ~~call~~ ^{call} for the police and things like that. The girls observed the ruling, I know I had been picketing over at the Peerless Laundry and came across Granville Bridge, and was going down ^{to} the Cascade. I went down and there was a policeman walking round there. But I didn't see him. But some girl came out on the fire escape, which was over the sidewalk, and emptied a teapot, which nearly hit me, and I called up to her and told her a few things. And from nowhere this policeman arrived, and accused me of causing a disturbance, and told me that he had told me there was to be no hollering. I tried to tell him that I'd only just arrived there, and I said if that girl came down here, I said, I would show her what I would do. But we had a haven. In the lane behind the Cascade Laundry was a vacant lot, owned by a private ownership, which they turned over to the laundry workers. The union men, of various unions, put up a shanty for us. Because we struck in the worst time of the year, from September to January. We had a stove and a coffee pot and things like that, but we could get in ^{there} and get warm and still go back on picket. So I knew if I could get onto this here lot, the policeman couldn't take me off without

EB: (cont) a warrant. So I made it. And he kept me there for five hours, until a longshoreman came along, some of the girls notified the longshoremen, came along backed the car up, I got in the back seat and we took off before he . . . But I stayed for five hours on there.

SD: Were there injunctions used against the strikers?

EB: No, that was the only one that I, that ever really went to court. Some of the girls was taken in for throwing rotten tomatoes.

SD: Was this when they were trying to stop scabs from crossing the picket line?

EB: Yes.

SD: Were there a lot of scabs who crossed the picket line?

EB: Oh, yes, and we used to, the longshoremen used to come up, and the Peerless Laundry was the worst I think. And they used to line the girls up inside, and then they would bring private cars, like the bosses' cars and that, and the girls would get into them. And then they'd take off, you see, and they'd drive them to the nearest streetcar. But we had some of the longshoremen, that would come along with their hooks, and they would give the signal and they'd rip a tire, and while the air was going out we were doing all the yelling, so's they wouldn't know, and of course they would drive off and they'd have a ripped tire. And this time, a group of

EB: (cont) picketers was coming back from the Peerless.

They didn't have money for carfare so they walked. Some of them were on the bridge and coming onto Granville, the other half had crossed over and was going down Pacific towards the Star and Pioneer. And they started to yell. I was on the corner of Pacific and Granville, I was not in the . . . some man and he came along and he said to me, "You're an innocent bystander," and I said, "In a sense I'm still one of them." And there was a shot on the corner and he pulled me in, and he said, "Get in here, here comes the police." And they took in about eight, but the judge didn't, they had to appear before a court and I went to go to hear the court hearing, and they wouldn't let me up. The police barred me from going up. Of course, I think they knew me, like, and knew I was on the executive and things like that, and they said, "The case is going to get thrown out anyway." And in about fifteen minutes the girls came down with a reprimand from the judge to act like ladies instead of hooligans. (laughs)

SD: Were the women pretty militant, it sounds like they were quite militant?

EB: The girls?

SD: The girls on strike, yeah.

EB: Well, it was something new, it was a novelty. You see,

EB: (cont) women had never struck before, in Vancouver.

This was actually the first women's union to go out on strike and bring themselves before the public and we did get an awful lot of sympathy.

SD: That's something I was wondering about, what kind of community support you had.

EB: You would go on . . . picket duty and it would be pouring rain. And maybe two longshoremen would come along with a car and they'd say, "When do you get relief?" And you'd say well, whatever time you were being relieved. They would come back, and they would take you up to the White Lunch and buy you a meal. Which was a godsend to lots of girls that didn't have homes.

SD: Especially cause they were trying to survive on strike wages?

EB: Yes, and my own father was a foreman carpenter on the city, and he would come along with his gang of men. And I know one morning he came and he, it was pouring rain and he said to me, "You have no rubbers." I said, "No, they're home." So he said to me, "You'd better go up and get yourself," so he gave me a dollar to go and get these rubbers, and he turned round and he said, "And what about you?" And there was about eight of us and all the men had given each one a dollar to go up and

EB: (cont) buy a pair of rubbers, so'd we didn't get our feet wet. The general public was in sympathy, I think they'd realized that the time had come when women should be holding their own with regards to labor.

SD: Was there that kind of publicity? Did people talk that way that it was a good thing that women were organizing into unions, finally?

EB: Yes, , you know what I mean. Now you see a strike on and it's women, the general public if they feel like crossing a picket line they'll cross it. But they didn't, they didn't. And we gained a lot of sympathy too, when we placed that in that we would man any laundry free of charge 24 hours a day, with three-eight-hour shifts, free, for anybody. We had gone out to say that we were willing to help because the flu epidemic in those days in Vancouver was drastic.

SD: It's almost like a workers control kind of attitude.

EB: It was, it was, you know, and even with the general hospital they were working about ten hours a day and we offered to go in and keep it running 24 hours a day, to relieve some of the helpers and that. But we were turned down on it, we got no response at all on it.

SD: Okay, and people ended up losing the strike despite that.

EB: We lost the strike. We figured we'd been out three months. But we figured we would of still kept up, only on the

EB: (cont) first of January, of 1919, the minimum wage came in and they brought in the amount that we had gone on strike for. So the Executive and the Trades and Labor figured there was no sense in staying out, we had gained because we had brought this in, it was the opening of going for other minimum wages.

SD: Do you feel that the reason they brought in that minimum wage law was because of . . .

EB: Well, they had started ^{it} about a year ago, before, but they had done nothing about it, like all the commissions now they take about a year before they turn the first page. And this was, they were just holding back on it. And of course this laundry workers' strike brought the climax, they had to do something.

SD: Did the workers lose their positions? Like if they hired scabs in their places, did you all get your jobs back?

EB: Well, the scabs more or less, they dwindled away.

SD: And the union workers went back?

EB: Yes, and we went back to our old jobs, like.

SD: Did people sustain their union membership?

EB: Oh yes, yes. Oh, yes. And when I started in the Union Laundry, and I told my father that I had got up to the job there, he told me I had to quit. That there was other girls that needed the job worse than I did. I

EB: (cont) wasn't going short of anything. And I told him I wouldn't. So he said, "Well, you can keep your overtime pay, but your \$13.95 will get paid back into that union to help some girl that needs it." And from the middle of October until the first of January I got what overtime I made, but ^{my other,} the \$13.95 was paid back into the union to help somebody out. My father was a very strong union man.

SD: So did you grow up with pro-union kinds of ideas in your family?

EB: Yes.

SD: How about your mother, how did she see your union activities?

EB: Well, my mother was that way too. Because, this was my stepfather. My own father was a union man, but my stepfather was also very strong, they were both stevedores in the old country. My father died six months before I was born, and my mother married about a year after. So the only father I ever knew, was my stepfather. Who to me, they threw away the pattern when he was born. He was a wonderful man. And he advised me in many, many things of life and . . . though my own father, that would be in '98, 1898, there was a dock strike. And when he came home my mother said to him, "How did it go?" And he said, "It didn't go." He said, "When

EB: (cont) you get them all of one mind, you will get them all of one side, and that will be never." And it prove^s it today, you don't get mankind all one size. And you get a group that can't pound sand, and they can't see the betterments that is being done for them. So therefore you don't get them all of one mind. But the labor movement was just beginning to start, in about 1897 and '8.

SD: Here in Vancouver, you mean.

EB: No in the old country. Vancouver, Canada wasn't organized then.

SD: Where exactly were you born?

EB: I was born in North Woolidge, a suburb of London. That's where the ^{famous} Woolidge arsenal was that they tried to block so much during the war.

SD: Right.

END OF TAPE

Ellen Barber
Tape 2. Side I.
EB: Yes.

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SR: These are just a few questions I wasn't quite sure of.

How old exactly were you when you started working?

You said you were underage, when you started working
in the laundry.

EB: I was fourteen in the October and I started in January
to work for the telephone.

SD:

EB: No, fourteen, I'd be 16, 16.

SD: What year would that be?

EB: 1914. January -- I actually wasn't 16 I was a little
over 15. I was born in '98.

SR: Do you know how many members there were of the laundry
workers union when you started? You know, just a rough
figure, maybe.

EB: There was Cascade, Peerless,
Dominion, Pioneer. I would imagine there was around
400. You see there was drivers and washers, tumbler-
men as they call 'em.

SD: But the drivers were in the Teamsters, weren't they?

EB: They were more or less governed by them, but they came
in with ours too, you know what I mean, they belonged
more or less to the two. I think that was to give us
moral support, of the male gender, you know, like. . .

SR: How many women members would there be, and how many

SD: (cont) male members?

EB: Uhm, five . . . I would roughly say about three hundred.

SR: Would be women?

EB: Women.

SR: So it really wasn't a lot more women in there?

EB: Oh, yeah, they were more in the majority, oh yes. Three times, you say there was three women to one man. Easily.

SR: And the B.C. Tel union, how many people would have been in then, in that?

EB: You see that was a 24-hour basis, you know. Oh dear, I . . . that I couldn't answer. There would be. . . I would imagine there would be 30 or 40 operators and supervisors on the shift, on one shift. Because the switchboards went from Seymour right back to the lane that was the full length of the building, you know what I mean. They were all switchboards on one side. There was quite a few.

SR: Were there two shifts or three?

EB: Three. You see it's a 24-hour service you see, the telephone. Course the night operators might only be five, five with a supervisor, you see, because what I mean, they would be standing. There's a light on the switchboard over here, they'd go running backwards and forwards.

Star:

SR: Sara asked before about your connections to political parties and I was wondering if the union members, like

SD: (cont) yourself, had any connections with the suffrage movement that was going on at that time?

EB: I don't think so.

SR: I know that Helena Gutteridge did, that she did some . . .

EB: Oh, yes, she was a suffragette. And she had a kind of a leaning to us, you know what I mean, that when she was talking to us she'd maybe bring up a topic. And we would agree with it. But we didn't belong to the Suffragettes.

SR : Why not?

EB: Well, I think, at that time, we figured that we had enough in organizing the workers. That would come up because women in those days were not educated to these different topics and ways of life. They, as I say, they were wives, mothers, and that was their, in fact, when I was a girl that was the ambition of every woman, was to get married and have children. And you had to get them, start to break them away from that outlook. So I think for myself that's one reason why we didn't get into the Suffragette movement.

SD: Did working women see it important, though, to get the vote? Did you support having the vote? Did people see that as a way of being able to change the conditions . . .

EB: Oh, yes, yes. Oh yes, the women were all out for the

EB: (cont) vote and things like that.

SR: You just didn't want to get involved in the actual movement because you didn't have time.

EB: Well, we did support them in a sense, like, you know what I mean, they knew that if it came to any crisis, that we would be behind them.

SD: The labor movement, though, had different positions on women voting, I know at one point that they supported women having suffrage, I think that was in 1914, and then at another point they were opposed to it. ^{And} I wondered if there was much discussion.

EB: I think it might have been this way: you never thought of a woman becoming a politician. And, you know, the men had brains in those days, too, and they could look for the future. And whether it was in their minds, that some women could be educated, that they could step into their positions in the Parliament.

SR: Did you have any feeling that the women who were in the Suffrage movement, the middle-class women, sort of looked down on the working women?

EB: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

SR: It was just a feeling then, of having your own work to do.

EB: Yes. Yes, and I think they realized, too, that, as I said, if there had been any crisis, that we had to declare ourselves, that we were behind them. And they realized that, that what we were doing, was more or less helping them, too. Because we were trying to bring a woman into her equal rights.

SR: I've heard a lot of things about that period of time that the middle-class women did some kind of reforming things that the actual^{working} women didn't necessarily agree with, like conditions in factories, and they were concerned with the moral well-being of the girls in the factories. Do you have any comment on that?'

EB: No, I don't think so.

SD: Were there women's clubs going^{though} in Vancouver that were mostly for I guess middle-class women that did support work around working women, like, I know in the '30's, there were special clubs set up for unemployed girls that came from middle-class women's organizations, like the YWCA . . .

EB: Oh, yes, yes.

SD: What kind of role did the YWCA and temperance people . . .

EB: Well, I don't think there was too much of it. Mind you, the YWCA was very strong. Cause we joined it, the Excelsior girls joined it. And we had some good times with that, I learned a lot through the . . . but

EB: (cont) I'll tell you this much. There was a class distinction there. Cause we had a conference, a three-day conference, I can't remember much where it was, and one woman got up and gave her views of it. And the views that we took was, that we were down here and they were up there. They were a little bit above us, you know what I mean. And I fought against it. I said I didn't care what work a person had to work, whether it was factory, laundry or anything, or stenographer -- anything. They were all working people, they were working for a wage and they were ^{all} equal. Some of us were not blessed with the education, but we tried to keep ourselves above a certain level.

SR: In your laundries, I know that earlier on there had been problems between Chinese workers and white workers. Was that existing at the time that you were working the laundry?

EB: No. The Chinese had their own laundries. You never saw the Chinese work in a white laundry.

SR: Were the Chinese workers men and women or just men?

EB: Men - - well, it was families.

SR: I see, the whole family worked in the laundry, then.

SD: Were they excluded from the union movement at that time?

I know a lot of the craft unions had positions which

SD: (cont) explicitly kept orientals out of them. Was that, when you tried to organize the laundry workers did you try and organize the Chinese workers?

EB: No, because it was more or less a family . . . they didn't interfere with us. And they were being paid such poor wages, you know what I mean, and you figured that for 50¢ you could send a dozen pieces in. Didn't matter what it was.. My mother used to send -- this was before I, our laundry, started. She used to send in maybe one sheet, a bath towel, maybe a tea towel, and the rest was my white petticoats and my white starched skirts. So there would be nine of those that she was getting done, for 50¢, besides this one sheet. They went by the dozen pieces, where we didn't, the white laundries went by different departments, you know what I mean, bed linen and stuff like that..

SR: Was there a movement on at that time to boycott, a union movement to boycott the Chinese laundries?

EB: No, no. There was actually not enough to . . . there wouldn't be any more than about seven or eight laundries. And they were just in, in a house, or it might be a block and they had the roof where they dried the clothes. There might be about four or five people working in there.

SR: How about the Oriental businesses in general? How did

SR: (cont) the trade union movement, in that early period from 1914 on. . . I have read stuff about boycotts by the trade union movement, of Oriental and East Indian businesses and shops.

EB: Oh yes, they were. But you know when we came out on strike, we thought that they would take Orientals in, to work as scabs. The Chinese promise was that was ^{not} one Chinaman would go into our laundry. But the Japanese wouldn't guarantee it, wouldn't guarantee it. So of course, Japtown got boycotted. But the Chinese did promise that they would not send anybody in, they did support it.

SD: The East Indians supported you as well?

EB: Yes.

SR: So the East Indians didn't work at all during your strike?

EB: Oh, no. Of course, they could not get their wives over here at that time. But they supported us financially.

SR: The East Indians did?

SD: How was that organized?

EB: Well, they would send maybe ten dollars in to the strike fund.

SD: Did people go out to their businesses and community organizations?

EB: Well, there wasn't too many of those.

SD: That seems like a bit of a contradiction, because the labor movement as a whole had such a strong position against Oriental and foreign labor.

EB: Well, I'll tell you why. It was not because they were Orientals or that, but you see, the CPR brought them in, for the railroads. They were underpaid, they lived in conditions that no white person would ever live in. And when that was finished they were scared they were gonna bring them over here and swamp the labor market to lower wages, which, in a lot of cases, they did. That's where the Hindu came in, the East Indian, came in to work in the mills. In fact, I think it was 1911, 1912, they brought a boatload of them, and they were going to land them -- they called the army in.

SD: That was the Kamagatamaru incident.

EB: Yes, mhm. hmn. And it was stationed, anchored right in the middle of the harbor. It would be almost in front of the CPR's depot. And they started to swim across off the boat, and they just fired on them. They had to just take them right and ship 'em right back. And you see the East Indian and the Chinese weren't allowed to bring their wives over here for many, many years. The Japanese could. But not the . . .

SD: Was there any similarity in some of the attitudes towards Oriental workers and attitudes towards women workers, in that **did** trade union men at all feel threatened, that their wages might be depressed, if women began to enter industry at that time.

EB: No, I don't think so.

SD: Do you think that's in part because the women were working in all-women's job areas?

EB: I think so. I think so.

SR : So that the men weren't afraid the women going to take their jobs away.

EB: No they weren't afraid of them stepping up, you know, and . . . because you take even in your stores in the old days. A woman might be in charge of four or five clerks; but she was never a floorwalker. It was always a man.

SD: Even during World War One when women began to enter industry? At that time was there any hint of men feeling threatened that their jobs might be undermined?

EB: No, I don't think so.

SR: I'd like to get back to what you said before, when I asked you about the Shirtwaist and Laundry workers union? And you said that was a new one?

EB: Yes. That started, lets see now, I think that one was started in the early '40's.

SR: So you were just a local union, and you sent delegates

SR: (cont) to the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

EB: Yes.

SR: And you said something about joining the International?

EB: Well, the International, you see, to form a union you had to go to the States to get the charter.

SR: So did you receive a charter from the International in the States?

EB: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: When would that have been?

EB: That would have been in, between May of 1918. Because we started to form our union, you see, in May of 1914, and we had to have the charter actually before we could say we were bona fide union.

SR: Did the International ever send any organizer out to help you?

EB: Yes, about every three or four months we would get one up for maybe a day or something like that.

SD: Was it a man or a woman?

EB: A man.

SD: Were there any women who were in those kinds of positions in the International, who played organizer roles, or was it mostly men who held those kinds of paid union positions?

EB: Mostly that. I think in Seattle they had woman organizers.

SR: The membership of the International union, would that have been mostly women too, like in Vancouver, like

SD: (cont) the local?

EB: No, I think it was, most all the unions was dominated by men.

SR: Was your local number 105, by any chance?

EB: That I couldn't remember, my dear.

SD: Those little details . . .

EB: Yes. But I know they opened up Nelson's -- can we shut this out?

SD: Sure, unless it's another great story that you have.

EB: No we can turn it back on after this.

SD: Okay.

SD: Well, maybe I'll ask a question. You were, you mentioned once before that you were offered a supervisory position later on in the canneries, but, were you ever offered a supervisory job when you were a laundry worker?

EB: Yes, when the Nelson's laundry first opened up. The man that went in as a superintendent, was a former employee of the Pioneer Laundry, for whom I had worked. And he offered me a position of going in as supervisor, where I would just take note of how the girls were working, what the average was, and things like that. It meant more pay, no manual labor. But I couldn't see myself in that position, of dominating over others that

EB: (cont) had to work manually. So therefore I didn't take the position, being one that has always thought even the bosses are no better than the common worker.

SD: What was your family's response to your being offered this job?

EB: Oh, my father thought, you know what I mean, it was a nice thing, but it was on the advice of my father, talking to me and explaining to me the attitude that I would have to take, and what it might do to my disposition in the future, that more or less made me decide that I didn't want the position.

SD: And did they offer you a big wage increase? You said that it was something like \$25?

EB: Yes. The increase was a third more than I was getting, I'd say a third more than I was getting. And also my hours were not restricted the same as from 8 till 5, if I wanted out for time -- I was given certain privileges, but . . .

SD: Did the employers do that a lot, offer jobs to people who were strong unionists, as supervisors, as a way of trying to take them out of the union and put them into lower level management?

EB: In a sense, yes, because once you're in a position of being a supervisor or something like that, you are no longer a union. You could be called in, in the

EB: (cont) event of a strike. Which was very much against my principles.

S.R: Did it feel dangerous in the early period to be a union member or to start a union, like did people get fired a lot for that or . . .

EB: No, it was not compulsory. You ^{weren't} a union shop. Now, in the Excelsior laundry, you had to join the union.

S.R: Was that something that the union got in after ^{the} strike?

EB: Well you see the Excelsior started during ^{the} strike.

It started up as a union laundry, you see. And we didn't force them to but they thought when they came in, we would talk to them, and they would automatically join the union. But the other laundries, when the strike was over, you didn't have to join it.

S.R: So people didn't really feel threatened . . .

EB: Oh, no, oh, no.

S.R: Like you mean in the Excelsior, I meant just to be in a union, they weren't scared to lose their jobs?

EB: Oh no, no, no, no. They weren't jeopardized in any way because they belonged to a union.

S.R: I know there was no legislation at that time to protect your right to be in a union.

EB: No, no, there wasn't. But, of course, when we first started out there was so few union people, you know what I mean. And the companies didn't see where we

EB: (cont) could jeopardize them in any way, we weren't strong enough.

SD: Right.

SR: I'd like if you could give us some kind of description of what it was like to work in a laundry in 1914. Like, you mentioned before there was some division, like two folders and two shakers and two something or other. What was the work, could you describe it?

EB: Well, there was the washroom where it was manned by all men. And then there was the extract men that operated the dryers, that was just a tub that spun around, like. And then when it came to the floor above the washroom, it was all women. And your sheets came in one crate, what we called small stuff/was -- table napkins, pillowcases -- and that came in another. And that was what we called small stuff. The machines was wide enough to take a sheet and the girl working on the end putting pillowcases through, towels and like that. They could sit down on the folding side, but the sheet and big stuff, quilts and that, could not. And you fed into the machine one hour, and then you changed and went round, and you folded. Which took two feeders and two folders. And they could tell whether you were a good worker by your stacker, your stacking. When you'd fold your sheets you would put one on top

EB: of the other, and if you were a good day you could put them square up against them and it would be absolutely straight, there wouldn't be one overlapping or one this way.

SR: That's very exact work.

EB: Yes, it was, yes.

SD: What was the speed like?

EB: Speed? It varied on what you were doing. If you were doing what we would call home laundry, it was a moderate speed. If you were doing hotel work, that would go on to a faster speed. And if you were doing boat work, that went on top speed.

SD: What was boat work?

EB: The Grand Trunkboats, the union boats and that. Any boat that came in that had, we used to, the Pioneer used to do all the Australian boats, the Empress of Asia and Demeroo, and all that. But, you usually started out to be a shaker, that was shaking the pillowcases and the sheets.

SR: What was shaking?

EB: Well, you see, when they come out from the washer, and they go into the extractor, they come out just like . . . well, you know what a table napkin and tissues now. If you wet them they just go right together, and they therefore stay that way, so you have to shake them. And you took

EB: (cont) the top of your pillowcase and you shook it and then you took the seam and shook it. And that brought it out so that they just flipped them on and they went through.

SR: It sounds very much like an assembly line kind of thing.

EB: It was, more or less. It came from the tumblers, as we'd call it, to bring them loose like, and then it came to the shakers. And then it came to the big stuff and the small stuff.

SR: And you had all these different positions, like shaker and folder. Did you all receive the same wage?

EB: Yes.

SD: Were people trained when they began to work there and were they paid during their training period?

EB: No, there was no training, actually, what I mean is it didn't require it. Because you came in as a shaker, and you would see what the other girls was doing and maybe you wanted to go to the bathroom so they'd say, "Come on over and take. . ." and oh, if you were asked over and put some to go pillowcases you were really stepping in, and through that's how they learnt, you know what I mean. And maybe you would take a girl. I know I worked in the IXL, and my father worked for the city, carpenter for

EB: (cont) the city, and they used to take and drop me off at the laundry and then my father would go on to work, and my father insisted upon being in 15 minutes before, so that he could get ready for his men coming in. And so it meant that I was in the IXL about 20 minutes to eight. And we used to change our top clothes and put on our white uniforms, and I would be ready to start, I would start my machine up about 5 to eight. And there came a time when we had to

Side II:

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SIDE OF TAPE

work overtime. And I said, "Yes we will work overtime, on conditions we got paid for it." Oh, we would get get paid for it, we would get paid for it. When the pay came along, we didn't get paid for it. So I went to the owner, and said that I expected my overtime. And he looked at me kind of blank. And he said, "When you come in and punch the clock before eight o'clock, you don't get your overtime." I said, "Mr. Courtney, you keep a record of our . . ." "Oh, yes," he said, "Oh yes." Of the punched clock." I said, "You go over it and if I am late, since I've been working for you, if I've been late," I said, "you have a right to dock me." About a half an hour afterwards he came back and he said, "No, you varied by about three minutes. You're in here before quarter to eight." And I said, "Therefore," I said, "You can't dock me." I said, "When I got paid,

EB: (cont) for the time that I . . ." I'd worked overtime, but the other girls didn't. And the following week I said, "I got a two dollar raise," which was a lot of money. But you see actually it wasn't their fault, we were four blocks from the nearest streetcar, you could have a tie-up with them, or else your transfer didn't transfer on the right time. So a lot of it was transportation, but of course, as I said to my father about it, he said, "Leave 15 minutes earlier." And it's right, you know what I mean. And they did lose their -- and if they worked overtime after that, they didn't get paid for it. But I did.

SD: Did the union fight for them to get paid overtime?

EB: Well our union then was silent.

SD: Quiet, or just really weak?

EB: Well, they didn't seem to bother with it. But I know when I was working for the Star, they had a forelady in there that didn't like me. She thought maybe in the future I might take her job. And she threw all the dirty work at me that she could. And they put a lot through, a boat. And they put in on top speed. And when that is finished, they put a piece of canvas through, so that it falls on top, this is one lot, you see? They put the canvas through, and it falls here and it starts a new lot, so that you know that . . . And, we had been

EB: (cont) doing all these tablecloths and that, and we were going to do one of the union boats which went on top speed. So I happened to be folding and I was away behind. Two minutes would have pulled me right up, like you see. So I hollered across to her and asked her if she would cut the machines down, until I got caught up. And we used to have a carrier come through across the machines. The bedspreads would not dry once through, you'd have to send them back for the second, so we'd put 'em in this little wire carrier, and ship it back like, you see, and they'd pull it up. And we had a knack of, when it was coming through, we'd let it fold, and then we'd roll it up, you see, and just flap it up. And she came out and she said, "If you can't keep up, you know what you can do." And I don't know what, it isn't often I lost my temper, but I just grabbed this here sheet (claps) hot, bedspread up, and I said, "You know what you can do," and I never realized that I would ever do a thing like that. And I threw it at her. And the thing uncurled and it went round her, right round her neck. And I immediately took it off, like, you see. And I said, "I'm finished." So I walked off, and I punched my clock, and I went in and I said, "I've quit. Here's my card, I'll take the time, my time." And they said,

EB: (cont) "Oh, no. You won't get it till five o'clock."

But you don't work anymore." So I went back into our dressing room, and I sat and read a book. And I went in, for my time, and you see, this was just about quarter after one, so I had practically four hours, but I was docked this four hours. And I said to the superintendent, I said, "I'm short in my pay." He said, "Oh no, you're not." I said, "I am." I said, "You kept me in this building because you wouldn't give me my pay." And I said, "I've lost that time," I said, "I could have been out, looking for another job." So I said, "I want my pay until five o'clock." And he said, "Try and get it." I said, "Tomorrow morning I'll be at the fair wage board." And they gave me my time. But I was out, oh, three months, I guess, and then they phoned me to go back, and I said, "Not with that forelady!" ^{No.} I said I couldn't work with her. Well, anyway, they said, well she would have nothing to do with me, she was ordered that. So I went back, and we were working on the old machine and the bottom part of the mangle is a steel base, shiny steel base, and it curves like that, and these rollers fit into these curves. And if you don't have a string, going right round here, like, you know, over and ^{up} there, it will roll round the roller. So, that's what we used to

EB: (cont) call 'stringing'. Well, I hadn't done it for years, and on Saturdays we used to quit at 11 o'clock, part, one machine would go 11 to 11:30 and then from 11 to 12, so's we could have our lunch and still keep going, like. And we went for lunch and I came back down and somebody said, asked me if I'd put some string on the machine. And I said, "No, that's not my job, it's Georgie's." And they said she'd got fired. And I thought they said she got tired, I said, "Well, it's too bad about her. I'm tired too." And they said, "No, she got fired," and they fired her, why I don't know. She got fired.

SR: How often did you get paid, were you paid every week?

EB: Every week. Once a week.

SR: And so you worked six day weeks or five and a half?

EB: Saturday was, you never knew how long you were gonna work. You worked until the work was finished, you know what I mean. Sometimes it would be one o'clock, sometimes it might be three. It depended what they had. But you never worked any later than four. But when I worked for the Pioneer, the Grand Trunkboats used to dock around eight o'clock at night, and they left on Monday night. If the holiday was a Monday, we had to go back, about nine o'clock on a Saturday night, and we would work until just before 12 o'clock, we were

EB: (cont) not allowed to work after 12 on account of the Lord's Day act. We went back and we got the large sum of 25¢ for those three hours.

SD: That's incredible. What year was that?

EB: That would be, round 15-16. Course men were working in the mills, you know, for 15¢ an hour. Of course we used to think it was fun to go back, you know at nine o'clock, you know what I mean, being out on Granville gstreet waiting for your streetcar, that was something (laughs).

SD: When you worked in these laundries, it was like a piece-work system, wasn't it, in a sense?

EB: No, not exactly. In latter years it got more to the piecework.

SR: Did you get like the basic salary, \$7 a week, plus a bonus for extra work?

EB: No, only, as I say, like Labor Day always comes on a Monday. Well, that meant the Saturday before Labor Day, we'd have to go in and do the laundry for that boat so she could sail on Labor Day. So she wouldn't be tied up in port.

SD: You described earlier when we were talking, a situation where they brought in somebody to speed up the workers on the line, and to give them bonuses for speeding up, was it?

EB: Yes.

SD: Can you describe that for the tapes, cause I think that's really an interesting story, the way you reacted to that and the union workers refused in fact, to speed up in your areas.

EB: Well, around 1940, the Star Laundry brought in an efficiency expert, to show us where they could speed up on our production. There was two machines running, and there was a competition put on between the number one machine and the number two. I worked on number two machine and I thought the thing over and I found out that once we gained that speed that they wanted us to, we would have to live up to that. Granted, we were going to get a little more wages, but for what they were going to gain, the firm was going to gain, it wasn't worth it. So I talked to the girls I was working with and we decided that we would keep our normal speed. To gain this here speed, you went by weight. And laundry varies, sheets weigh heavier than a tea towel. And we were given all tablecloths, which does not weigh very much. So therefore, our production was away down to what number one was. At the end of one week, the competition was called off, and we went back to our normal way of getting equalization in weights. Number one machine, if we went over a certain poundage,

EB: (cont) we received a bonus. Number one machine was so worn out with the one week of trying to get this here competition, that they tired themselves, and number two stepped up. And number two kept on that they always received a bonus, we never went at a straight wage, we were our wages and a bonus. But I personally did not agree with it. The girls were working to their capacity, and therefore it was, the speedup was only for the benefit of the company. But it made you think. That you had to fight for your own rights or else you were gonna be put down by speed, not only in the laundries, in other places.

SD: You described how you infact advised the workers not to speed up.

EB: Yes, I did. The girls who were working with me were many years younger than myself, and at lunch time when we were talking this over, I advised them that we would not compete, that this was just a one-week event, and at the end of that week, we would come back to normal, we would be able to compete honestly, with no favors from the boss of getting a certain class of work. And I advised them to just keep on our natural speed, which we did. And "number one" found out their mistake, what they had done.

SD: And the bosses, what they offered to people was a dinner and a corsage, right?

EB: Yes, the prize for the competition was a dinner in the Vancouver Hotel with a corsage.

SD: A bit of a one-shot deal.

EB: Yes.

SD: Speaking of the worst that's paid. Another question I had was, what happened after the laundry workers' strike? What happened to that union? Did it sustain itself either through individual memberships or did it actually go on to build locals, or did it more or less fall apart after you had lost the strike?

EB: Well, we retained our union for two and a half years and then it began to drop away, but many of our members still held their union card. The union was still there but not in the strength that it was. But those of us that remained, still worked to help other unions and give advice where we could.

SD: Was it ever rebuilt?

EB: Yes. It was rebuilt in the early '40's, I think.

SD: Right, there was a strike in Nanaimo, in fact. A rather famous strike, I think in '48 or '49.

EB: Yes, yes, it came back.

SD: And did you continue as a delegate to the Trades and Labor Council? In that period of time? For how long were you . . . ?

EB: About two years, I kept that up.

SD: And were you on any committees, like the union label committees, or . . . ?

EB: Well I was in on a lot of talks, on my views, like, of what I thought that should be done for them.

SD: What were those basically? Can you outline what your perspective was, what your views were then?

EB: Well, we would go into the background of a factory. And we would work on that where we could figure that we could improve it and get more wages for a girl, then we would start in with organizing their union. But we might be three months working on the sidelines, finding out different things. And when we went in to get the girls, in the meantime we would find out one or two girls we could talk to, and get into their confidence. And then we would get the thing started.

SD: Would you do things like leafletting, did you leaflet factories, did you send in organizers and call meet-
ings, did you get backup from other unions^{when you} went in?.

EB: Oh, we got backups, yes.

SD: In what form, would people go and talk to them, or . . .

EB: Well, we would, as I say, we would try and get two or three of the employees that we could talk to. Then we would have a meeting of them, a general meeting of the workers. And then the organizers, the professional organizers, would go, come in and talk to them and everything like that. And then they would form the union.

SD: And were there ever women who worked on those kinds of organizing committees?

EB: Yes, you see, in some places they have different trades. And if one was organized, then they would try and get the other workers in there, either to come in with them or else form their own.

SR: I have a whole list of names that I'd like to ask you if you knew any of these women. Did you know Polly Brisbane of the Waitresses?

EB: Yes.

SR: You did? I have down here that she was one of the people who went to see the Minister of Labor, and she was a friend of Helena Gutteridge's?

SD: No, Helena Gutteridge. She was . . . Polly Brisbane knew

SD: (cont) Helena Gutteridge?

EB: Yes.

SD: Was Polly Brisbane much involved with the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council?

EB: Not that I can think of, dear. Course, she might have gone in after I came out, you see.

SR: But she was an organizer in the Waitresses?

EB: Yes. The reason I actually came, even though I still went to meetings as an observer, like, you know what I mean. And I went so that if there was a topic came up they'd say, well, "Ellen can tell us what happened," you know. But I had joined the Ancient Order of Foresters when I was a girl, and I started to go through the offices, and I went as high as any woman's gone in Canada. I went on as District Deputy Chief Ranger. And that meant that I could go to any club in Canada, man or woman's, and they had to admit me. And that took a lot of my time, and of course I travelled quite a bit through the province, to Kamloops and to various places like that when we were forming new lodges and things like that. I went with the District Chief Ranger as a woman, like, you know, he went **for**the men and I went **for**the women, like you see. So that more or less my time then was taken up with

EB: (cont) my lodge, you see.

SR: Did you know a Lillian Koot?

EB: I can't place her.

SD: The name's familiar but you don't know?

EB: Not that. You see, when you're asking me names like
this . . .

SD: It's a long time ago, I know . . .

EB: Yes, and I'm going back to people that I have met on
a provincial board of the old age pensioniers, or a
convention or something like that, you know what I mean?

SD: Yes, I was just hoping you might know some of their
married names, maybe so that I could . . .

EB: No. Uh, Helena Gutteridge, her name was Fern, wasn't
it?

SD: I don't know.

What was your maiden name?

EB: Goode, G-double O-D-E. Yes, uhm, Helen was, oh and she
was for the returned men, but she wasn't for the returned men.
In July of 1918, we were getting a lot of the return men^{ed}
back. And in fact they had a strike of the streetcars.
And I had a brother-in-law came up, and he had just come
back from overseas, and he was going to go out and man
one of these cars. And he was up on a holiday from Medi-

EB: (cont) mine Hat. And he told my mother so when my father came home, my mother told my father. And we're sitting having supper and he, my father asked him about this, and he said, "Sure." And my father said, "Pack your grip and get out." He said, "No scab ever sits at my table." And she was not sympathetic with the return men at all. And there was the incident of a chap, it seems that he tried to join up and they turned him down. And then he was pulled in as a conscript. And he resented it, and he went into the hills behind Comox, and the Mounties went in, and they shot him. His name was Goodwin.

SD: Ginger Goodwin?

EB: Ginger Goodwin. And that was when they called the 24-hour strike.

SD: He was also a union organizer, wasn't he?

EB: I think so. And they, my father came out, and a lot of people said why when my brothers were overseas fighting, you know what I mean. But my second brother was turned down, and then they conscripted him. So this stuck in my father's craw, too. But Helena's very derogative to the flag and the Empire and everything like that, and I'm trying to think of the man's name, and he was head of one in the Trades and Labor Council. And later he left that and he went in as General Manager of the General

EB: (cont) Hospital. But the return men organized a march and they marched on the Trades and Labor Council. And Helen Gutteridge and this chap had to kiss the flag.

SR: Bet they didn't take too kindly to that.

EB: No, but she married a return man. But the marriage broke up very quickly. And I think her, I'm not sure, I think her married name was Burns. Now I wouldn't swear to that but that seems to come to my mind. But she took her, her maiden name after she broke up. And I met Helen, as I say I dropped away, and then she started, some board, and it was during the Second World War, and whether it was wage and price control or not, I don't know.

SD: The War Labor Board, or . . .

EB: Maybe it was. But I went to this meeting, and I met Helen, and I haven't seen her for years and years. But I guess Helen now is pretty well out of all movements, isn't she, because Helen must be . . .

SR: I'm not sure she's still alive.

EB: Because I'll tell you, Helen was a woman of 25 to 30, when I was only 20, and I'm close to eighty, up to two months. So what I mean, she would be, if she is, she's not taking any part in any, I don't think.

SD: I think she died a few years back, I'm not sure.

SR: She was an alderwoman, wasn't she?

EB: Yes.

SD: The city's first woman alderperson.

EB: Yes, and you know, I, now who was . . . Merritt that time.

But anyway, we had a doctor by the name of Lyle Telford.

Very, very strong . . . And Lyle Telford had left his

wife, and he had a nurse, and they were living together.

And this mayor said, Telford had no right to run on

account of that. But in the meantime, Telford got

his divorce, and he married this Miss Mirand. And

Telford, he said, this mayor, and the queen was coming

for a visit, in '39, it would be terrible to have

a man of Dr. Telford's character, to greet the queen.

But in the meantime, he'd got his divorce and got

married, and who greeted our queen? It was Mayor

Telford. And he was a very, very strong, CCF.

He's dead and gone now, but . . .

END OF TAPE

SD: What happened in the '20's? What kind of shift did you see in the labor movement from, I guess that early period when you were involved in, you know, 1917-1918 through the 20's. Was there a fall in militancy and membership in the labor movement, or did people continue to be active in it?

EB: They still kept on their activities, but with regards to getting out and trying to form new ones, they more or less were at a standstill.

SD: Why was that? Do you have any ideas?

EB: Whether it was coming back, with the return men coming back, the disruption of the men from the military life to civilian life, I don't know.

SD: So that would also probably have a fair impact on ^{un}organized women workers, I guess, it would mean there weren't real attempts to organize them.

EB: Yes, yes.

SD: Another question was what happened during the Depression when the Depression (hit.) Did most women leave their jobs, or lose their jobs, during the Depression?

EB: Oh, no, oh no. They didn't lose their jobs. But of course there was no work for anybody. But if you had a job you weren't laid off because you were a woman. In fact, in some places, where they could replace a woman,

EB: (cont) a man with a woman, it was done.

SD: Was that so they could pay lower wages, or . . .

EB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SD: So how did the trade union movement react, was there a call for equal pay for women?

EB: No. You see you had no power in the Depression, you had no power in anything. If you had a job, you were lucky. Now I worked in the Star Laundry during the Depression, and highest pay I ever took home for a week was \$10. And you see, people before would be sending out laundry, well when they had nothing coming in they were doing their own. So therefore there wasn't the work, but we still had to put our 48 hours in. We might sit there for an hour and a half and have no work. But the highest wages I ever took was \$10. Mind you, I was a millionaire, to some people.

SD: What kind of impact did it have on the community that you were in, when the unemployed men began to organize around their rights, around trying to win unemployment and insurance against the workcamps. Do you remember that? And the kind of impact it had at all?

EB: No, not particular.

SD: Another question I had which was in the earlier period was, what kind of impact did the Russian Revolution have on people in Vancouver? Was it something that

SD: (cont) people talked about a lot?

EB: No, no. They were nothing else but a bunch of Bolsheviks. But, mind you, a union person looked on it in a different light. They looked on it from the human side. And I'm not Communist by any means, but I do admire some of the Russian ways. Of their education. If you haven't got money, and you have the ability, your education goes further.

SR: Were people talking about that kind of thing at that time, just after the Russian Revolution?

EB: Well, they were talking that at least the people were being freed from being a slave. Which that's all they were, and you have got to admire the people of Russia, the way that they have come, because in 1917, they had no education, they had nothing. And now they have brought the working people up, and educated them, they're one of our legion nations. And to think that, you know what I mean, they were living in mud huts and the life wasn't worth anything.

SD: Did any of the gains that women made in Russia have an impact here? Did people know about the fact that the women had won equal work? -- BREAK IN TAPE

SD: So we were talking about the Russian Revolution. What I was asking was, whether people knew that women had won equal work there, or at least, in their constitu-

SD: (cont) tion, and the changes in the marriage code and these kinds of things. Whether people in Canada, knew about it, whether it had an effect on them.

EB: Only I think with regards to the labor movement, that took an interest in those kind of things. But the general public, they had to get almost on an equal to the Western world, before they began to realize how Russia had changed.

SD: So people in the community didn't start calling labor unions, like, a bunch of Reds, or . . .

EB: Oh, yes, oh yes, we were called Reds. And if you didn't think you were there some people would call you Bolshev-ik, you know what I mean, but it was just in one ear and out the other.

SD: At that time I guess the Communist Party was beginning to form in Canada.

EB: Yes.

SD: What kind of impact did that have within the labor movement, the fact that there were a group of people who supported the Russian Revolution?

EB: It didn't have a good take with the labor movement.

SD: Why was that?

EB: Well, we have a freedom here, which is not in Russia. They have freedom to a certain extent. But they haven't got the freedom that we can go out and support a party

EB: (cont) and be open about it. They don't. And they are subordinant to their lords and masters yet, over there. But, no, the labor movement -- some labor unions did cater to them. But the majority of them didn't.

SD: This was in the early period?

EB: Uhm hm.

SD: So your period of activity within the trade union movement was 1914 to the 1920's?

EB: About that.

SD: And when you began to be less involved, why was that?

EB: Was it because of the general conditions of the Depression, or . . .

EB: Well, as I say, our union had began to fade, we weren't predominant.

SD: Were there women's organizations for working women other than union^s, in that early period of time?

EB: No. I think the reason for that was, we have a different mode of living now. As I say there, a woman, when I was a girl growing up, was considered a mother and a housewife, and a housekeeper. And that was mostly what women worked at, if they were out working it was either as a servant or a housekeeper, or something like that. But you see as our education changed and things like that, women's minds became broader to the — more alert to the ways and the needs of the world. And

EB: (cont) that's when they started, too, to really come into the changing of it.

SD: So you feel that it was women's own psychology that kept them out of the . . .

EB: Yes, I think so. Because what I mean, no mother if she had ^w children, would think about going out to work.

SD: Well, there wasn't any childcare, I guess she couldn't/

EB: No, and that, and there wasn't the opportunities of jobs for women. There was in the canneries, you know what I mean, and the laundries. The waitresses, and the tailoresses. Chambermaids, hotel workers. But that was the extent.

SD: There wasn't a big service sector like now of white collar workers.

EB: No, and even in your offices, women weren't predominant which they are today. Most all of the, even their clerks were men. It wasn't a woman's world at all. A woman's world was in her home, and I think the only time a woman went out to work was if her husband took sick as a breadwinner, or if she was left a widow.

SD: Did the employers use that at all to either counter union/organization or to try and control the women?

EB: No, I don't think so.

SD: They didn't refer to women's place as being in the home in order to . . .

EB: Oh no, oh no. I'd say, they didn't have no call for it, because there was very few married women that went out. If they did it was through a misfortune that they had to go out. But the majority of women, they had enough-- and of course a woman in those days had enough to do to keep a home because it was a washboard, it was a scrub brush, we didn't have no vacuum cleaners, or anything like that. And we had no dryers, your ironing was all . . . I know the first, when I got work, the first thing I bought my mother and I paid a dollar and a half for it, a whole dollar and a half, for an electric iron. And I bought it for her for Christmas. Now you would've thought that I'd a given her a Rolls Royce. She thought it was so wonderful that she had an electric iron, that's how, that was in . . . about 1915.

SD: Did people generally have phones in their own homes in 1915 around?

EB: Very few.

SD: Just mostly businesses.

EB: Businesses, and the odd person would have the phone in.

SD: When did that begin, that most people had phones?

EB: Well, let's see, we went to . . .Wall street in 19 --
I would say, right after the first war, after 1918.

SD: Would that affect the way the public would see the
telephone workers?

EB: I think so. And you know, your telephone then was very
cheap to bill. But we moved to Renfrew and Wall street,
and there was no electric light and there was no tele-
phone. And my mother had a heart condition and we had
gasoline lanterns, then. And I said to my Dad, "You
know, if Mother ever takes an attack, and we've got
to stop and light one of those things . . ." So I
went down, I got two years off from work to look after
my mother, and I went down to the B.C. Electric. They
would put it in because they could run it across Yale,
you know what I mean, but we had to pay \$50 for a pole.
So we took the \$50 out, and we got the electric light
in. So then I said to my Dad, "You know, instead of
having to run three and a half blocks to phone the
doctor, why don't we get the phone in?" "We'll get
the phone in." Well I went down and applied for it,
and, yes, they could connect up, and I think, now, I
may be wrong, but it was between \$30 and \$40 that we
had to pay the B.C. Electric to allow the telephone

EB: (cont) company to hook up on that pole, and I said, to that man, "Goodness me," I said, "We just paid \$50 for that pole to get the electric light in." He said, "The moment the electric light was sparked into that," he said, "that's a B.C. electric pole. That's not yours." And then about three months afterward, they put the electricity down and down went the telephone. But a telephone in those days was a luxury. You'd really stepped up into a higher bracket, like, with a telephone.

SD: So during the strike, then, people would not see it as one of their services that they needed being taken away from them, but instead they saw it as business and . . .

EB: No, they didn't. You see, and the reason they struck Seymour, Seymour was in the area of the business, it was right downtown, you see, it was only about a block from Hudson Bay, and it was all business there. And that's the ones, that, they figured by pulling them out it was going to effect.

SD: Did the businessmen in the city support the strike, then? Or were they against it?

EB: Well, they were against it, in a sense. But the telephone girls got it. Course they, linesman and the repairmen,

EB: (cont) they were in the union, so they more or less helped the girls along, you see, to organize. But again, there was no compulsory union, you see.

SD: When did closed shops begin to come in, was that not until the late '30's and '40's?

EB: Um, yes, that came in pretty well after the Depression, when things began to pick up.

SD: You mentioned earlier that some of the logging camps had family camps?

EB: Yes.

SD: Can you describe what those were? Did you ever live in one?

EB: No. That's one thing I regret. I ^{only} had the 17 years of married life with Mr. Barber, and he liked a family camp. And my mother and father was alive, and his mother was alive. The rest of our family was all over on Vancouver Island. And then it was travel by boat. And one of us had to be here, in case something happened to one of them. So, therefore, I couldn't follow him, but I would have loved to have followed him into the camps, cause I like camp life. I like the outdoors. But they, the family camps is where you might have a dozen families living in the camp, around the camp, and that was why a first ^{aid} aid man working in those got more money, because he

EB: (cont) looked after the families, too. If they had mumps breakout, you know what I mean, he isolated them. And if a child was hurt, he was just, looked after them because most camps, family camps, are isolated. There's ^{very} few that can't be got into by road, now. But in those days it was just over a corderoy road. And it was hard to get them in and out, And I know we had a case of mumps in one camp, and in these here family camps, they have a first-aid room, and then they have a bedroom office, two beds in it, where they can put anybody in them. And this boy had the mumps so of course he's naturally isolated. And another boy said that, Douglas said to him, "Well, you'd better go in there, too." Well they had an argument anyway and Douglas said to him, "Well, you know," he said, he got the superintendent there and he said, "I wash my hands of him." He said, "He won't take the treatment," and he said, "He'll have to suffer the consequences, if there is any consequences." And the kid said to him, "What do you mean?" "Well," he said, "that can go down on you." And he said, "You can become sterile." And boy, the boy did. He didn't take the treatment, he wouldn't stop work and things like that, and of course my husband warned all the rest of them, not to drink from the same cup, to take their own cup

EB: (cont) and that they didn't drink, to keep away from the germs as possible. And this one boy that he put in bed, two weeks afterwards he was out working again, you see. But the other one, they had to ship him off to St. Paul's or something like that, he became sterile.

SD: You also mentioned that your husband would have to learn, I guess, "maternity"?

EB: Maternity, yes.

SD: What would that involve?

EB: Well, you see, in the married quarters, you see, married camps there would be pregnant women. And instead of having to send them off to hospital, he would deliver. Mind you, he always said that, in an emergency, he knew what to do. But I think the company, it was the Company, wanted it so that they would be more or less covered with him having the training, to do it. Because, you see, every woman that went out there, they used to have to take them to Tofino, they had to take 'em out by plane. So it meant that Douglas had to go in on the plane. He'd lose a day's work, come back on the next plane. That was costing money, you see, where she could have had it in her own home, you know what I mean, and been looked after. They'd have had a camp woman there, you know, that would go look after the family and things like that.

SD: Was that in the late '40's?

EB: That was in 1955. But I think where he gained a lot of his knowledge was even from his father, ~~in~~ inheriting it, because his father died six months after he was born, no, six weeks. But anyway, when he went to work in the North Van Ship, he had a boss there, and he was going through for a doctor, in Saskatchewan. And during Depression^{days} there was no money, so he had to give it up. But he had learnt enough to be a school-teacher. So he went in for a schoolteacher, but Jake had got this knowledge, of three years of medical, you see. And that helped Douglas a lot, too. And then of course, with Douglas being overseas in the First World War, nothing repelled him or anything like that, an accident, you know what I mean. Even though he might feel it, he could walk into it and be cool, where some of the other men, cause they had some terrible accidents over there in North Van, would go in and they'd almost faint, you know what I mean. So he got sent in and all these here, if a man was killed in the hole, he was the one who went down. And as he said, "when you"- and I could always tell when he came home for supper, and I'd put his supper out for him and he'd say, "You know I'm not very hungry. I don't think I, Do you think you could keep this warm or something," and I'd say, "Well,

EB: (cont) what happened?" Oh, this happened, that happened, and you know, by this time, I'm ready to bring ^{up}. . (laughs) And he liked camp life, but he was barred from the woods.

SD: Why?

EB: He was a high rigger. And he fell 40 feet, that was when the old Capilano and Cassiar used to run up. They came on Monday and they didn't come back till Saturday. And he's hurt about Tuesday. And when they ^{the knees,} got him down, he was in camp for about four days, and they brought him down, and it was about a two-day journey down, and got him into the hospital, and the knees was up on the chest here, and they couldn't straighten them. And they had to put him under and straighten him out. And he was in the hospital for about six months I think. And instead of him taking a pension, he took a lump sum. And that barred him from the woods. Until 1939, they were crying for men to go back in the woods, you see, and he applied to go back as timekeeper and first-aid man. So they let him back into the woods. And I think he worked about a year, and he came down for his holidays, and somebody said to him, "Why don't you go in for

EB: (cont) first-aid in North Van? So he quit and went to the North Van.

SD: During the war?

EB: That was during the war, yeah.

SD: Why did the lump sum bar him from working in the woods?

EB: Well, he had broken the contract, I guess, or something, I don't know, but you see they wouldn't let him back because in those days they only had a timekeeper, they didn't have first-aid men. And he thought that seeing as he couldn't work in any manual labor, ^{and} he bought a little business on 5th Avenue and Commercial. And of course he did very good at it, because the Dominion Bridge people were all around that area, and they used to go in and buy a lot of stuff off him. Well, then the Dominion Bridge closed down, and of course if they'd come in they'd maybe run out of dough for a week. Well then the men got laid off they moved off and left him. So he declared bankruptcy. So actually, but . . . oh, compensation was a lot different to what it is nowadays.

SD: Well if that was in the '30's, the IWA wasn't organized yet, was it?

EB: No.

SD: Because I know later on in the wood industry, the IWA women's auxiliary was always very concerned with

SD: (cont) safety, and trying to fight for . . .

EB: Yes. Oh, yes.

SD: Were you ever in the auxiliary of the IWA?

EB: No, no. No, because they, when I got married he was in the, when I met him it was the Depression Days, he wasn't working at all. And then when we got married he was working in North Van, see. And then when he came out here, he never liked working the mills, he liked the open space. And he went to work in the mill here, and then he went up to Whannock. And he worked up there for a long time. And then he got tired of that so he thought he'd go back to the woods, so he went back to the woods, and . . . but he had a citation from the queen for his work, and he was always, he was what they called a Double-A Gold Star. He had taken the Double-A so often, and he had done different things that, - they had an accident at Whannock. And they had to bring the man into Columbian. And Douglas cleaned that the wound and bound it up, and he went up like. He shaved the man's head. And he had to come in with the ambulance with him. With the superintendent. And when they got in there, they had got a specialist in there, and he said, "Who did the work?" And the superintendent said, "Our first-aid man." He said, "I'm not even touching it." And they never even touched it for four

EB: (cont) days. But, as I say, he was in the shipyards where they had to do a lot of things. Now in isolation places they can stitch, but here, they don't, they're off to a doctor. But over there, they used to do stitching. And they've even pulled teeth, they could give cocaine and that, because the doctors, you see, the one in North Van, the man couldn't handle it all, so he, they would phone up and say, this part was hurt or this, and explain, and they'd say, "Do this, do that or the other." See, and Jake being a part medical student, knew, so that's how my husband gained a lot of his knowledge, and he did study.

SD: Right. When you worked in the laundry, back then, was there industrial accidents in the laundry? At all, people getting burned or caught in the wringers or stuff?

EB: Well, we had one, there. And when my mother died, our doctor wanted me to go in for a nurse. Well, he wanted me to go in for a nurse before, and it meant that I had to leave my mother, you know, I had to go in training. And then Dr. Lyle said to me, "Nellie, go in for a nurse." And I said, "No." "For one thing," I said, "I'm too old," I was 25 when she died. I said, "I would be close to 30 before I came out, before I'd

EB: (cont) been over it all." So I dropped it. And we used to have what we call 'body-ironers'. And they were a machine that had an underplate of steel, and then a padded roller on top, and it was four levers, and you see. And these do the bodies of shirts, ^{and} they slip them up, all of them. But a lot of things, like bodies of uniforms and that, and then ironers would only have to finish them off, you see, with the sleeves and that. And this girl was doing this here shirt. And you put your foot on one pedal to go and the other one to stop it, you see. And she's turning around looking at somebody, and her hand went in. And it burnt all the flesh right off here. And I worked on the lower floor, and we had a lift elevator you used to pull up by a rope. And when that bell went, and it went, like persistently, you knew there was trouble on the top floor, you see. So I immediately run up and of course the girl had fainted, and that took the pressure off of it, you see. And when I got in there, he, the superintendent was behind me and he said, "We'll take her downstairs," you see. We took her downstairs, and he was gonna dress it, and mind you, what he did was right, but it was wrong. He should have put a piece of gauze over the top, then cotton batt^{on}. But instead of that he put ^{caran?} oil over it, which was the thing that was

EB: (cont) treat^{ment} for burns, then. He put that on and stuck cotton batting on top of it. And bound it up in a bathtowel, you see, what I mean. And he said to me, "What doctor will we get?" And I said, "Well, let's get Dr. Telford." So we stuck her in the back of one of the trucks like, you know, and I went over with her. And when we went in, his nurse had just gone out for her lunch. And he took it off, and I wish you could have heard -- well, I couldn't put it on tape, the language. And he said, "Who did it?" And I said, "Well, our superintendent." Well there was some more words. But anyway, he said to me, "Do you think you could stand with the chloroform, you know, in those days, they put it in the mask, like, and used to hold it over, and he said, "Do you think you could do that?" And I said, "Sure." So I held it, you see. You have to keep her under, just under. And he took a pair of tweezers and pulled it out. And anyway, he said to me, "Where's your first-aid man?" I said, "Well, the superintendent's always done it," it was either just a little a crate would, burn, or, you'd get a sliver or something like that. There's no accidents at all. Well, he said, "He's done his last first-aid job." So . . .

END OF TAPE
SIDE ONE

EB: And sometimes I think I was foolish, so I didn't, you know what I mean? Because I loved working with anybody that needs help or something like that. But that was the only serious accident that I ever heard of in there, and it was just that this girl, if she had been watching, her machine, she would have known. But instead of that she had her foot on the pedal to go, you see, and turning round listening, running all over her hands, you see. Until finally she passed out. But that's the only accident I can . . . Oh, yes, we had one in . . .

SD: I don't know if I should have asked this question.

EB: . . . in, let me see, 1918. It was 1918 or 1919, the early part of '19. The Peerless Laundry had what they called a drum mangles. And it had a cracked cylinder. And it was leaking steam. And the engineer was a personal friend of ours, by the name of Lake, and he reported it to the management, to close the machine down that it would blow. And if it blew it would scald. Well, they closed it down and they fixed it up, and Lake, Jack Lake, said, "I'm off the job. I won't handle it," he said, "because that's gonna blow." And so he quit. when
And in a day or two afterwards the thing blew, and there was four girls -- well, one was killed. And three was scalded. And we had a job to get the Peerless

EB: (cont) Laundry into our union. But, when they heard about this here fatality, and the girls, we took up a fund. We collected, and we took it over to the family of the deceased. And then the Peerless Laundry came in pretty well 100% in our union, because the union had stepped in and helped them, you know what I mean, when they needed it. But that was an accident, but, you know what I mean, could have been avoided. One of the girls is badly scarred, she went back to the States to have . . .

SD: Plastic surgery?

EB: She went down to Mayo Brothers or something like that, and she was down there for months and months, they peeled her face, you know what I mean. And then she was so badly disfigured. But I think the laundry paid for that.

SD: I really don't have any more questions.

SR: I have just a couple more. We'll keep you going all afternoon. In that early period you talked about the Depression, the later Depression in the 1930's. What about the effect on work for women in the Depressions from about 1913 on?

EB: Well, women couldn't get work and nor could men. We had a breadline in 1913 in Vancouver. Many people don't

EB: (cont) know that, but they did. And they just didn't, women did go to work, but they went into more or less war work. A lot of it was not paid for, you know, voluntary work. That's where the women went in from about 1914 on.

SR: 1914 is when you got your job at B.C. Tel, right?

EB: Yes, mhm hmn.

SD: So, were you lucky to get a job, like were there not many around, or, was there a lot of really low-paid work, or . . .

EB: No, when you went in to that, it was more or less a trade. And I think I got in under the influence of these two operators and a supervisor living next door to me. And you see they had pushed me, they had ~~lesrnt~~ me all the work, the bookwork, and when I went into the class, the class was operated by two sisters, both maidens, very pretty, by the name of Dixon. Their home is still there on, near the United Church on Hastings Street. But they didn't, Miss Storm and these two operators, didn't let on, you know what I mean, that they had helped me in any way. And, of course, when she'd ask a question I would act dumb for a minute and then I would come out with the ^w answer. Of course, they thought that I was just a . . . my I.O.

EB: (cont) was ~~was~~ above anybody else! And actually it was all I had to learn was the switchboard.

SR: What was this class, was this like a training period?

EB: You went in for two weeks.

SD: Two weeks. Were you paid?

EB: Two weeks training period, yes, you got paid.

SR: How much?

EB: I don't know, it seems to me, that ~~the~~ wages then was about \$12. Because it, when I went to work in the laundry, you know what I mean, going to work for \$7.

SR: That was less, the \$7?

EB: Oh, yes, less than the telephone. And you know, that's where I made the mistake. When I became 17 I shoulda gone back.

SD: To B.C. Tel.

EB: And I wouldn't have been in there very long before I'd of been the supervisor. And they really made money.

SD: Do you know anything about the Women's Employment League that was started around, I guess, 1913, and went on throughout the war, I think?

EB: No.

SD: It was sort of like an employment agency started by some of the women's groups in the city.

EB: No, I don't remember that. Helena Gutteridge belonged to the Women's League, during the Second World's War.

SD: Right, that was a different group, the Women's Labor League.

Actually, Helena Gutteridge was involved in this earlier one, too, the Women's Employment League.

EB: I think she would be. I think she would be, because you see she belonged to the Suffragettes. And that was really, her ambition was to get the women organized and come into their equal rights, and things like that.

SD: Women who, in that time, who were politically active and knew each other, did they spend time together socially?

EB: I don't think so. Their work was in a day's work. It might be carried on to an evening meeting. But most of their work was done in the working hours, and around five or six they quit for the day. Unless they had called a meeting or something like that. Because I know Helena Gutteridge was in the Trades and Labor Building about 8:30 in the morning and she left around five, five or six, depended, you know what I mean, so if there was something coming up she'd have supper and stay for the meeting, and that.

SR: Did she get paid as a, by the Trades and Labor Council?

EB: Oh yes.

SR: What kind of wages would she have made?

EB: Well, I don't know, she would get a decent wage in those

EB: (cont) days. You know when I worked in the Excelsior Laundry I was making more money than my father was.

SD: Cause it was the base rate, the minimum wage they were paying you.

EB: It was the minimum wage, I got my \$13.95 and then, see, we were the only union plant, and sometimes you worked until nine o'clock at night. We might get a break. If they did the boss would load us in the truck and take us out to supper. And we'd have an hour's break and then we'd go back, you see.

SD: Who owned Excelsior? Was it a co-op ^{with} shares?

EB: No, it was two brothers. And you know the reason they went broke? They were too good to their employees. If an employee was away sick, or in a hospital, they got their wages. And their employees stole off them. Like, in what they called the sorting room, that's where your bundles go in, and they, a girl sorts them and puts them on a bill, what's on that bundle, like, two tablecloths, four sheets, all this. And if there was a lace tablecloth or a beautiful tablecloth came in, it was never checked. And it was put in a bag. It was what we call net washing. When it came out, this marker or sorter would come out and get that, and it went home. And of course, a person would come in and claim for it, and they would claim, maybe for a handlace

EB: (cont) Irish crochet tablecloth, fifty or a hundred dollars. And they had to pay it out. And their employees broke them.. We had one office girl there, that got married, and she had two miscarriages, and she went in the hospital, appendicitis for one, something else for another, and she got her full wages and the hospital bill paid. That's what broke it, then, they were too good to their employees.

SR: They were favorable to the union?

EB: Oh, we were a union, close^d union shop.

SR: Right. But the brothers who owned it, they thought that was okay?

EB: Oh, yes. Oh yes. Mind you, if we had a dispute or the superintendent didn't like anything, I was shop steward, they'd run across to the St. Francis Cafe and bring in coffee and we'd sit in one of the little offices and we'd talk it out, you know what I mean, and I'd say, "Well, according to union rules," or this that and the other. And they used to say, "I don't give a damn about the union, there. This is my principle." And you couldn't move 'em on it. But it was a just -- when I took it to the union, they'd say, "Well, we can't come on 'em because it's a human act. There wasn't anything against the . . ." Like I worked on what we call the tumblers, and I was getting \$21 a month, a week.

EB: (cont) That was big wages. But, mind you, if I had nothing to do five minutes, and my towels were not dry, I would immediately go over to another department, and I would help them out there. I'd go into the starch, you know what I mean. And when I got taken off that and was made forelady, a girl went out and she went out on the straight wages. And she said to me, "You got a lot more on this job, didn't you?" And I said, "Yes." So I went to the, Dave, and I said . . . "Yes," he said, "I know." And I said "Well, why's she not getting it?" He said, "She's getting a union rate." I said, "Well, that's not fair." He said, "Not fair," he said. "I'll pay an employee the union rate, and I will also pay them what I think they're worth above that union rate." He said, "I never see you -- when your clothes, your towels aren't dry, or your curtains are not dry" -- I used to stretch the curtains and that -- "sit up on the table. You go over," he said, "and help with some dress shirts. Or," he said, "you'll go over and shake." He said, "You never sit idle," he said, "Or you might pick up and start and sort out," the clothes, you know, you all had a number. He said, "And that's what you get your money for, Ellen." He said, "But she doesn't," he said. "If her work's not ready for it, she immediately sits on the edge of

EB: (cont) the table and that's it." So he says, "She's getting paid for it." And he did that with one or two of the girls, you know what I mean. If he figured that they did their own job and they tried to help with somebody else, they got a little extra. And he wasn't above, when he'd come round with the paychecks, he'd say, "Well, Mary, you're gettin two dollars extra this week." "What for?" "Well, that'll be your wages from now on." "Well why?" "Because I think you're earning it." And that's all that he would say. They were too good to their employees.

SD: How long were you at the Excelsior for?

EB: From 1918 till, I think they went broke in about, close to the '30's, '28 or '29. And I missed two years because^{as I say,} I went home to look after my mother. When I left, like, I said that I was sorry I had to go and they said to me, "Well, we'll put somebody else in your place, and when you can come back, there." So when I went back, I went back into my own job.

SR: I'd like to hear a little more about what you did at B.C. Tel, the first three months when you worked there, then there was the later period.

EB: Well, I went on to the switchboard, like, you see, and I worked allright. But they were girls all over 17, you would say in the neighborhood of 20, 23, 24. And when we got our rest periods and we went down into the lounge or into the cafeteria, in those days girls weren't as wise as the girls of

EB: (cont) ten and twelve know more than I knew about motherhood and sex at 20. Because that was all covered up from you. It was never exposed to a young woman. And of course some of them would tell a joke that was a little bit smutty, or something like that, and of course I'd giggle and giggle and giggle, and then they'd say something else, then maybe about a miscarriage or something like this, and to me it was dumb, I'd sit there with a blank stare on my face, and that's how they found out, of my age, you see. Because, you see, I was then, when I was that age, I was pretty well as tall as I am now, and I weighed about 150, 160 pounds, so I was mature. And of course in those days I had beautiful hair. And I did it in a girlish fashion. But the moment I went there I went to a more adult style, which made me look 17. But you see, as the head supervisor said, they hated to let me go because I could do the work. But the government required 17 years of age. So they had to let me go. But they did give me, I think, two months pay, in lieu of notice, like, you see.

SR: And that would have been unusual at that time, wouldn't it?

EB: Oh, it was. It was. But I think it was because this supervisor, Miss Storm, was, well she was well-liked by the company. And these two, Annie and Mary Dixon, thought that I was really something because I knew everything before I went in there. And they were never told, you see. And they hated to let me go, because they figured, you know what I mean, I was

EB: (cont) brilliant enough to learn it, at that age, I was brilliant enough to stay on, but as they said there was nothing they could do, it was a rule.

SR: So in 1918 and 1919 were you actually working there again, or did you just help in the organization of the union?

EB: Was I . . . ?

SR: Were you working at B.C. Tel?

EB: Oh, no, I came out of B.C. Tel in 1915. The beginning part of 1915.

SD: But you helped with organizing the strike . . .

EB: Yeah, and I think it was about 1920 that we organized that. Yes, and then I went in to help organize them.

SD: Did you know people who still worked there from when you had been working there before, four or five years before?

EB: No, no. Because you see, when you go on, unless you meet them in the coffee bar or the lounge, once you go through that door, you enter into the switchboard area and of course it's silent then. There's no word spoken, you know what I mean. You might nod to a person, or . . . but you never said hello or anything like that, on account of it going through the wires, you see.

SD: Were most women workers then full-time workers, were there any sort of part-time workers or temporary workers in that early period?

EB: No. Not in the Telephone.

SD: How about the laundry?

EB: No, they were all full-time.

SD: And was there a high turnover of women?

EB: Of employees?

SD: Yeah.

EB: Well, the telephone as I say I wasn't in it long enough to know, but, no, they kept their employees for years, and the same with the laundry.

SR: In B.C. Tel, what were the working conditions like there? Did you have very long boards and did you have to reach sideways ~~far~~ to plug in?

EB: You sat on one of these swivelchairs, you know, just like an office chair. And it was quite a lot higher than the ordinary chair. And you would reach as far as you could, on both arms. And that was another point that was good for me, because I'm very long-armed. And I could get over to another switchboard, like, you know what I mean, I could plug in there. If the girl was busy I could just say, and I'd take her calls here, or I'd take em on that side. That helped me **too** because I had long arms and long fingers, you see. You wouldn't think that little things like that would have anything to help you with, but it does.

SR: I heard that when people click their receivers the noise would sound in your earphones? Did that bother you a lot?

EB: No, I think you more or less get used to it, you know.

SR: In 1914, I believe they had a royal commission that investigated partly the telephone operators conditions and they said a lot of girls had nervous breakdowns because of all the . . .

EB: Not only that, the head equipment was very heavy. Now you see they only have the earpiece which is two wires across here, like, and the one ear. But then it was two, and that was, well, I guess it would weigh five pounds. They were heavy, you know what I mean. Course it was a lot of different wires and that too, I guess they hadn't . . . but the equipment now is much different.

SD: Did people get rest breaks?

EB: Rest breaks? Oh, yes, yes, we did.

SD: When were they, like, what were they?

EB: You would get your, you worked eight hours, you would get your break for lunch or supper. In the four hours. And maybe if the switchboard was slack, the supervisor'd say, "Okay, take ten minutes."

SR: Did the supervisors walk . . .

EB: Back and forth, yeah.

SD: What happened if you were getting overloaded?

EB: She would plug in. She'd plug in and take some of your calls.

SD: Did you get in trouble for that?

EB: Oh no, oh no. No, because, see, there was no way of them helping it. Because, take this building, for instance, right

EB: (cont) now. And the switchboard up the hill. And ten of us were pretty well on the same line of numbers, like. Like mine's 3872, 3873. So you'd be all on the one switchboard. And about ten of us, just think, "Oh, I must go and phone Mary up." And you'd pick up the phone, you see, and you'd get all those ten calls coming in. There was no way that you could help it. But I had a stepsister that worked for, in the Fairmont exchange. She worked for about eight years and then she got married and went to Victoria. She worked in Victoria, and then she came back and she went on this relief, in Hastings East. She only quit about seven or eight years ago. But their conditions are a lot better than they used to be, too. I think they have a seven-hour day, now, don't they? A lot of the places where they're employing women, have come down to seven hours.

SR: I think it's, well, you're there for seven and a half hours, but . . .

EB: Yes.

SD: No, you're there for eight hours and you get paid for seven and a half, with a half hour lunch.

EB: Yes.

SD:

I had a question about dues, which was, did women have to pay less union dues, lower union dues, than men, because their wages were less, was there any consideration about

SD: (cont) dues?

EB: I can't remember that.

SD: I know in the States, they did for a while. And one of the effects of that were people saying, "Well, you put less money into the union you shouldn't get the same amount of services . . ."

EB: No, I think we paid the same.

SD: Well, I think the tape's almost over. Do you have any more questions?

(Laughter)

END OF TAPE.