

SD: So let's just begin by going through some of the first questions. Can you give you name?

VL: Uh, Verna Ledger.

SD: And did, were you born in Canada or did your family immigrate?

VL: Yes, I was born in Can, Cranbrook, B.C.

SD: And when did you start to work?

VL: I actually worked in a bank, in about 1950; and then I was married for about two years; and then I became separated from my husband; and I went then in Canadian Forest Products in 1953.

SD: Okay. What kind of work did you do in the forest industry when you began to work there?

VL: I began as a dryer-feeder in a plywood mill.

SD: How did you decide to work in the forest industry, because ~~no~~ many women don't work there?

VL: Really it was the pay, because I had two children to support. Although I probably could have got back into the bank again, I couldn't possibly have supported two children on what I made in the bank. My brother was working at Canadian Forest Products at the time; and he was able to talk to the manager there. I was hired temporary, because at that time, they didn't hire women who were married; and I was only separated; I didn't have a divorce. So I was put on temporary until I obtained a divorce.

SD: So part of how were able to get in was because you had a relative.

VL: Yes, that's right. Mmmh.

SD: And were there other women working in the plant?

VL: Yes, at that time there were quite a few. There was about 900 to 1000 employees ^{there} at that time; and I would say that 400 to 500 of them were women, which is not the case now.
(laughs)

SD: So, well what happened to those women, the first ones?

VL: They, at that time, we were paid less for the jobs, that women were confined to certain jobs and they received less pay; so the employers were willing to hire women. This had been a continuation from the war-time, when women did most of the jobs. And then in 1966, we obtained equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value. And at that time...

SD: We were talking about equal pay, and laying off women in the forest industry. And you were talking about how that process happened.

VL: So what happened, was that they, when we gained, when the union gained the equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, we, the company ^{es} then refused ^{to hire women} anymore, and as attrition took place, women, there was a number of women gone from the work place. And it got to the point where, I guess there was, you know, they were, we were down to at least about 80 women in our particular plant from a possible 4 to 500. Then, I'm not sure of the year, yes I am, it was after the NDP was elected; the Human Rights Act had come in under the Socreds; and I had written to Peterson and asked him in terms of, when I explained what was happening with the job and the women being hired; and he said, I can't remember his exact answer, but

VL: (cont) in other words, he said I didn't have really too much hope with the Human Rights Act, the way it was then. And, but then when the NDP got in, they set up those, oh panels, I guess it was, I know Rosemary Brown was on it, and they held hearings. And we presented a brief called Where Have All the Women Gone, (laughs), that was the title of it, and, just telling the facts of how the women had been hired during the war, and then had sort of been let go when men came back; and then the few women that were there in '66, they no longer hired any more to replace the ones that left. So, they, part of the problem also was, that when the NDP got in, the companies realized that they were going to have to, that there was going to be changes to the Human Rights Act, and they were going to have to start hiring women. They hired I think about six in the operation I worked in, sort of token type of a thing. And then they didn't hire anymore. And they started using the Factories Act: there was the 35 pound weight factor in the Factories Act; and they used that. (I don't think that's it, sorry). They used the 35 pound weight factor in the Factories Act as a means to keep women from certain jobs, even though we had been doing those jobs for years and years years and there was lots of times you were lifting weights or pulling weights in excess of 35 pounds. They started using that, saying, "women couldn't do those particular jobs." So that was what we also said in our submission to the government. The ^{Factory Act, ~~the~~} Factories Act was changed; there was a number of things that were causing problems that were taken out of it, and one

VL: (cont) of them was that section on the 35 pound weight factor. And, so consequently, there was no further reason not to hire women, so they started to hire a few; but they used all kinds of means, like sending them to the Green Chain, which is a fairly heavy job, and then saying they couldn't do the job. So we had to grieve those things through their Human Rights Department. But we were successful. And now basically, they hire-most of the operations, I wouldn't say all of them,-I think there's still saw-mills and that, that are, you know, we still have to work on them, and use that Human Rights Act to get women in, if they choose to work in there. But the plywood operations in a lot of the mills now are hiring women, still not the numbers that I think are applying. But we have no control over that, because we have that 30 day probation^{ary} period, you know.

SD: Right. Are women hired into specific kinds of job categories, within the plywood mills?

VL: No. Usually there's basic, or a little above basic *rate* jobs that new people are put into, but there's no, they don't distinguish between the men and the women; they go to most of the jobs.

SD: To go back to when you first began to work in the forest industry, can we maybe go into^{a bit} more detail about the different conditions for women and men in the industry. You mentioned that women received less pay than men, and that they were doing the same job, what kind of attitudes were reflected on the shop floor towards women? And how did

SD: (cont) the women see themselves as workers in the plants?

Did they want equal work, and equal pay?

VL: Yes, as a matter of fact, yeah I can remember one particular incidence before we actually got the jobs changed so that they were all open to everybody. They had a classification called a core-feeder, and that was supposed to be woman's job; but during relief periods, they used to send men to those jobs. Junior men! When we attempted to do something about it, they said, no we couldn't complain, even though these people were junior. And that was a little higher rated job than some of the other women's jobs. And so ^{you know,} if you went there in a relief period of two hours, you would gain a bit of money. So we attempted to grieve it; and they said, "No, we didn't have a right to grieve it." That they were going to send those people to that job, the men to that job. So what we did in this one particular instance, was all of the women in the area that I worked which was the raiman patches area, and that would have been taken to about 20 women I guess, walked over and sat down in front of this particular fellow that was feeding core at the time, and ^{we just} sat there. I had just become a shop steward at that time and I was so scared! And they called us into the office; and we had to talk to the personnel manager. But we gradually got that straightened out so that they did no longer used men on those, that were classified as women's jobs. But what we wanted at that time was to open all of the jobs; and we said that to the company. But it was a little after that that they were finally opened

VL: (cont) up. That was just one instance.

SD: Was there overt discrimination against women, not only by management but by the guys who worked on the shop floor?

VL: There was some men that didn't think women should even work, you know there was ^{there was that;} that feeling, [^] I think that occurred after the war, that women were taking away jobs from men, and there was still that feeling, mostly amongst the older men. But it wasn't as bad in the operation I worked. Now I understand at Fraser Mills, it was a real serious problem and when they finally did hire women, they, they had a real bad problem with the men treating them quite badly because they felt that women shouldn't do those jobs. But there was just left over from that period when felt that they were being, that women were taking away their ^{, their} work.

SD: The fear of another Depression, and soldiers returning home...

VL: Right. Right.

SD: That whole *conjuncture*. Were there any special concerns in that period that women raised around their ability to work, for example around child care and children? Did many of the women have kids, who they...

VL: Oh yeah, I had two myself, you know, when I, when I started to work there.

SD: What did people do?

VL: Well I was fortunate; I had my mother living next door to me, so that was how I managed in that case. But I can remember a particular instance where a girl was working at the plywood mill and she had two children, three children I believe; and she was having so much trouble getting baby-sitters, reliable

VL: (cont) baby-sitters, and the money she was having to pay.

She finally said it wasn't worth it any longer, for the harassment. Because we worked shift work, which made it difficult; you had to somebody at the, on night, during the night or on graveyard, at late night.

SD: Were they swing shifts?

VL: Yes, swing shifts. Three different shifts. And so if you had to get a baby-sitter during the day, maybe that wasn't so bad, but to have one stay all night, that was pretty tough. And she had such a time, she finally said it was better for her to go on welfare, and she did; she quit and went on welfare, because she couldn't, you know she just couldn't get a reliable people to baby-sit for her.

SD: Were any of the women single mothers who worked there?

VL: In those days, if they were they didn't say so, you know, in the main. Now there's nothing wrong with that, you know, there never was anything wrong with it but people accept it whereas they didn't in those days, so if women were single mothers, they didn't generally tell you.

SD: So it's hard to know whether...

VL: It's hard to know.

SD: ...whether they were married...

VL: Yeah.

SD: ...

VL: But alot of them were, there was probably alot of women like myself who were actually single mothers because they were divorced, you know. And so they had children to raise, and

VL: (cont) that's the problem I had. I, as I say it wasn't too bad for me because I had my mother; but other women didn't, you know, and there was always the problem of having child care. And of course I don't think any of us thought about whether we should ask the company to provide a day care center, in those days, you know. We, it just didn't enter your mind, you know. In fact I can remember sitting and talking to some people, some women ^{one time} about day care centers, and they were quite opposed to them because they felt that they were, there was things wrong with putting children in day care centers. But I always thought that they would be good, especially if they were government-run, you know, day care centers. But...

SD: Right.

VL: Anyway, ^{or} not just day care, you need 24 hour care when you're in a shift work situation.

SD: Okay. Let's talk maybe a little bit about the union in that period of time. How did you become a shop steward? How did you become active in pro-union? You stated at one point before we turned this on, that your family was a pro-union family.

VL: Yes, my father was an officer in IWA a number of years ago. And so I had been raised in a union family. My grandfather was even, on my mother's side, was quite you know interested in labor history and active in the labor movement. So I had been raised that way. And my brother was the plant chairman at Canadian Forest Products when I started there. He was always *after* me (laughs) to attend meetings. And I did a few times, and I got kinda bored because I thought, I didn't really understand alot of things that were going on. So I didn't attend

VL: (cont) too often. And, but I always was aware of what was going on; and I was always concerned about the union; and learned things from my brother. And then when my children were a little bit, grown up a little bit, that one of the fellows, that's how it started, one of the fellows that was on the committee, came up and asked me if I would run for the safety committee. And I said, "Oh, ^{my} gosh, what am I going to have to do, I don't think I can do it." And he said, "Sure you can, you know, you don't have to do anything." They always tell you that. And so, (laughs)...

SD: They just want to get you into it.

VL: So I ran for the safety committee and I was elected, and of course, up until that time I think I'd always been a rather chicken; I, if a foreman really harrassed me I never said anything, you know. Then I began to think, if I'm, in our union if you're on the safety committee you're also shop steward. And so I thought if I'm going to have to defend other people and help them, I'm sure as heck going to have to do it for myself first of all, you know. So I think it was shortly after that, the foreman came up and he was really giving it to me about something, and I just up and I told him exactly (laughs) what I thought. It was the best feeling I ever had in my life. And from then, you know I was always nervous, but from then it got better and better, and you were better able to understand. (laughs)

SD: *He probably went into shock!* (laughs)

VL: (laughs) Yeah, you sure did, because *he* just never expected

VL: (cont) it from me.

SD: Was, were there shop stewards on the safety committee because of the importance of safety as an issue in the mills?

VL: Yeah, we have in our contract, we have, safety committees come under the master agreement, as well as the grievance or plant committee. And then ^{also} the alternates, and any other elected people are shop stewards. So all of those people are shop stewards within a plant, you know. And the chairperson can also appoint; so people who want to become shop stewards and are, seem to be coming along and are quite good at it, the chairperson can appoint that person as shop steward. And in our union we have a very good educational system, now, for shop stewards, and that's how, we have seminars and so on, and that's how they learn.

SD: So, were you appointed or elected?

VL: No I was elected, I was elected to the committee. And ^{then} later I was asked to run for the, also for the grievance committee or the plant committee. And I did that as well. And I became, at, then af, sometime later became secretary of the plant committee. And...

SD: Mmhn. And now what's your job? Are you the Regional Director of Safety?

VL: Yes.

SD: So that's how you became active. And you have the support of rank-and-file people clearly in you were elected. Were you elected by women and men, or by mostly women?

VL: By mostly men. (laughs)

SD: (Laughs)

VL: Because what happens in our union we, or in our particular Local, is we have a meeting; at that time we were having plant meetings every month, well, you know you don't get a very big attendance, I guess maybe a 100 people would show up at a meeting; and those people are the ones that elected the committee, or nominated I'm sorry, nominated people, and then the committee; and then the election actually took place in the plant. So out of the people that voted there would have been about 40% women and the rest were men.

SD: Mhm.

VL: 60 men.

SD: Right. Right. What kind of issues did you have to deal with as a steward and as a member of the safety committee?

VL: Oh, god! Everything! Mostly on a plant committee you deal with day-to-day problems of people as far as policing the agreement. And even you get into some social and personal problems too. You try to steer clear of that, but sometimes people come to you with those kind of problems, and so you have to listen and try to assist them. And usually, I think the basic idea that I have of a shop steward is they act as the representative of the person on the job, and I always felt that, no matter what job I was in, whether it was on the committee or on the safety committee, that I was representing the workers in the plant, and that was my main function.

SD: Right. So it was around a whole variety of issues that

SD: (cont)

VL: Yes, as far as the safety issues, that was one of, you know trying to get the best, safest conditions, both health-wise and safety-wise for the people.

SD: Okay. Were there any specific issues that came up that related to women? There was equal pay and equal work; and there was a whole fight around that I guess...

VL: Mnmhn. Mnmhn.

SD: Can you talk a bit about the struggle to get that recognized by the union, as well as later on by management, maybe that whole process?

VL: Well when I first, as I said, before when I got, started to work, I wasn't terribly active in the union, and didn't really realize the process that had gone on. But I understand before I really got active that women brought up the issue of pay, not being the same, that was the first thing. And they were told ~~at~~ that time by people in the union, that they shouldn't fuss too much about it, because the first thing they would know, ^{they,} ~~there~~ wouldn't be jobs for women ~~at~~ all. And of course in the end that's what happened, that when we did insist on it; and it was gained through negotiations, then they did stop hiring women. And so the union was right in that particular instance, you know that that was what would happen and it did. But then it was sort of accepted ~~and~~ ^{not} to be, and I blame the women for that in a way because we didn't protest ~~too much~~ when we, because we had our jobs, eh?

SD: Mnmhn.

VL: So you're not too concerned about whether some other woman is going to get hired or not. But when I first became active, it was something that really worried me, and I thought, you know I could see less and less women in the operation, and I thought it wasn't fair. And I talked to several people about it and they said, "Well, you know, there's not much you can do about it." So, you know, I asked questions and tried through a number of avenues to see what could be done; but there was always the problem of the legislation and various things like it that kept it, anything from happening. Well then when the Human Rights Act came in, I thought, "Oh boy, we got it made! But I might have known, under that Social red government they had before that it wasn't going to have much teeth in it and it didn't. But one of the first things fortunately that the NDP did when they came in was to put some teeth into that Act and put some staff to police it. And so...

SD: Right. Was the problem that there wasn't a combination of equal pay for equal work, with affirmative action programs basically, so that women would be insured jobs?

VL: I am not too clear on affirmative action. We, I've been to a number of seminars and women's groups within the B.C. Fed. and other areas in the NDP, and we've talked about affirmative action, and mostly I can't see really how it work in an industrial union. It, to me it seems like it would be better in a situation like government employees or CUPE or where there's clerical workers, and they're sort of ghettoized into certain jobs, and they have no option for promotion. Well we have that

VL: (cont) now, except not into foremen's jobs of course. But then we don't want them. (laughs). That's the difference in an industrial union. But it is true that if someone was looking, some woman was looking for a promotion into either a foreman or beyond, they just don't get it in our union or in our companies, the companies, ^{its} not the union.

SD: I think the main thing, the main argument that I've heard is that if you've got a union hiring hall, then the union can ensure ~~it~~ if it's got an affirmative action program, that women do in fact get hired.

VL: Yes.

SD:

VL: That's the other thing now; we don't have a union hiring hall; and we have that problem with probationary period. And this is where we were having the problem finding out what answers women were getting when they applied for jobs, because we have no, we can't get in touch with them, we can get in touch with them, I shouldn't say, within the first 30 days they're on a probabtionary period. But we have no access to them when they come to the office to apply; we didn't see them; we didn't know who was applying. And so we, in our local union we had formed a women's group, not the, they had a Ladies Auxiliary, but this was, besides that we formed a women's group, and we...

SD: What year was that?

VL: That might have about '74, I'm not absolutely sure on that, I'd have to look it up.

SD:

VL: But we formed a women's group. And we used it mainly for education, because there wasn't a large amount of women attended. We also allowed the wives of husbands, of men that worked in the industry to attend too if they wanted; and that was in the main what we got was the women that, the wives of various members of the local union, that were interested in being educated in various things: We had people, I believe at that time the women's organizer for the Fed. was Gail Borsari, and we had her come over several times. And we had public speaking courses and a number of things. And one of the things we had decided to do was set up a committee of women, of some of these women that weren't already working, and get them to go and apply at various operations, come back and let us know what the answers were, so that we could then pursue it through the Human Rights. But somehow or other that committee has just kinda fallen apart this last year unfortunately; we haven't had any meetings. It's something we're just gonna' have to get going again, you know.

SD: Yeah. Were there problems before, or was it difficult, or was it easy to get the union to accept the principle of equal pay for equal work before the actual struggle with the employers took place? What kind of attitudes were there in the union towards that? Something that other women have described in some unions is, are there an attitude that women didn't really deserve the same amount of wages because they weren't really working on the same basis as men; they didn't have

SD: (cont) families to support and so on. And other women have spoken about trying to ^uconter those kinds of arguments by saying, "Well, look, if our, you know if, if we have two wage levels in the same job, the employer's going to try and force the wage level down to the lowest wage level, which ...

VL: Mnmhn. Mnmhn.

SD: ~~level~~ ^{is the women's} level. So I wondered if you were there when those kinds of discussions were taking place?

VL: I didn't, as I say I wasn't really that active in the union at that particular time, the arguments I used to hear on that, and I did hear those arguments, but usually it was at the plant level, from the men working within the plant, not from officers from the union. So I can't really tell you what the attitude of the officers that were, of the union were, except that I was told that they had said, "Don't rock the boat, because you'll end ^{up}, there being no women in the industry, period." And we used to hear that from time to time. It was always kind of a threat held over our head, that they were, oh that they were going to get rid of all the women. And that, you know, I don't think that came from the union people, officers or anything. It was just something, a rumour, I wouldn't doubt ^{but} what it was generated by management. But it was always this little rumour that would come around within the operation that said, "Just watch it! Just be careful." And I always noticed that women took, you know we had 10 minute breaks for coffee, ~~except~~ that some of the men would take

VL: (cont) up to 15 and nothing was said. But the women always were timed and they watched their time very, very carefully, because there was that little bit of a threat, if you're not careful, you're, they're gonna' turf all the women out.

SD: They don't really want us here.

VL: Yeah.

SD: Yeah. Okay, that's interesting. You spoke about equal rights legislation, and also about women being laid off, or else not hired. It seems ^{that} part of what you're saying is that it's important to have government legislation that ensures that women can in fact get hired into these kinds of jobs, especially in a situation where you can't guarantee that within the industry, for example there's no hiring hall and so on, so that again begins to bring in the question of political action.

VL: Right. Definitely.

SD: So, you said ^{that} you wanted to speak about that, can you talk a bit? ^{going}

VL: Well, no I was, actually that's what I was going ^{to} mention when you, when we talked about political action, was the fact that if it hadn't been for legislation, we wouldn't probably have been able to change some of the things that we did change. You know I'm not saying that maybe in the end, we wouldn't have been able to negotiate some kind of changes, but it, it...

SD:

END OF SIDE I

VL: ^{SIDE 2:} ^{tape interruption} people. Yeah I was just going to mention that in, in the international section of our union in the United States, we have a person, I'm, I'm not to, can't remember his first name, it's Youngdhal is his last name, ^{who works,} he works on the affirmative action, the laws in the United States. And He's been very successful. Of course there's also the problem not only with women but with the Blacks and a number of other ethnic groups that have problems in various hiring and other things. And he's been very, very successful in winning money and jobs for those people. I'm sure that if you were ^{to} get ahold of the International, they could probably some, quite a history. He could give you quite a bit of history on that particular thing.

SD: That would be useful. So the union was completely organized when you came into it, so we won't talk about that. We were talking a bit about political action, right...

VL: Yeah.

SD: So, can you? (laughs)

VL: (laughs) Well I think political action is very, very necessary because everything we do in our lives is controlled by legislation, or almost everything. And that goes for hiring, or various other things, although the unions sometimes have control over some of those things, through negotiations. There's so many things that the legislation controls, that if people aren't politically active, then they're not really having any say in their own destiny I don't think. And that's why I'm, you know I belong to the NDP; and I'm president of a Centennial

VL: (cont) Club which is in the Coquitlam constituency. And take an active part, because I really feel that's one of the answers you know, one of the main answers to a lot of our problems.

SD: Is to elect a different government?

VL: Mnmhn.

SD:

VL: Right, and then make the changes that are necessary with that government. And we were doing that, I think we were successful in a number of areas while the NDP was in for that short time. Such as I mentioned before: changing the Factories Act, and putting some teeth in the Human Rights legislation.

SD: Right. Do, do women within the plants that you worked in, or were women within the plants that you worked in politically conscious or active? Did they think in terms of political organizations? Were the active women almost, were the active women political? Or, ^{and} was there any kind of separation between those women and the rank-and-file women in terms of, I guess their level of politicization?

VL: Well, there aren't too many that I could tell you off-hand that were ^{that} politically active. We used to have some really good discussions, because as I mentioned to you off the tape, this friend of mine, Marge Storm, is also politically active; her and I think a lot alike on a number of things. And we worked on the same shift; she was the plant chairperson and I was the secretary of the committee. And we, so we'd have our lunch breaks, and before breaks and coffee breaks together. And so there's a whole group of women usually sit together. For

VL: (cont) some reason they still segregate themselves into, that's there by choice, into certain sections of the canteen or lunch-room. Some do, some don't. But we used to sit in this one area and talk, and of course, it would always invariably end up either on union things or political things, and so then you'd get some interest in some of the women that are around you. And so were able to, in fact at one time I think a good part of our shop stewards were women because we had encouraged them through talking to become active and take an interest, and also they were politically interested as well. Because our union as a whole takes a very part politically, I think one of the most active unions politically in the province. And it certainly, our local union does a number of things; well Gerry Stoney, our president was, is now president of the NDP. So, but we've had educational sessions on political action. And we have a political action committee. And most unions do within the IWA have a political action committee.

SD: Right. So there was a period when many of the shop stewards were women, that's quite significant...

VL: Yes. Yes. There aren't so many now, unfortunately some of them left the industry and it slackened off. But I'm sure you know, it'll, it'll come back again. There's still a fair number of active shop stewards within our plant that were women, and of course the two leading positions on the plant committee were held by women.

SD: Okay. But what about within the ^{sort of} leadership structure of the union, what kind of chances in the sense ^{for} affirmative action were there, was in the union, was in the IWA itself?

SD: (cont) Are there women in central leadership positions; should they be there; what kind of process would be necessary to get them there? Why aren't they there? (laughs)

VL: There are no women in leadership positions, except in our local union, and I believe one other local union, the two recording secretaries are women, which aren't full-time jobs. The, partially, I don't really think there would be anything actually keeping women from getting those positions, And, and if they were active enough. maybe that's a problem with the union, that, that they haven't been encouraged to be too active. Now I'm talking about a fair number of years ago; in the past few years they have been encouraged more, certainly. And in fact I was encouraged so much I ended up in this (laughs) Regional Safety Director. So, it's, there is potential now for women to, I think, to seek leadership positions, if they wish to, but unfortunately there aren't that many that are, are looking in that direction.

SD: So there's been a shift in attitude?

VL: Yes, I believe so, yeah.

SD: Yeah. What do you think did that? Was it the women's movement? Was it a number of women within the union being active and pushing for those kinds of changes?

VL: I think that was part of it, yeah. And there weren't a great number; in fact, one time I can remember a regional, well, several regional conventions where Marge and myself were the only women there. And, but, one of those conventions, we had six resolutions on women's issues, and her and I took turns speak-

VL: (cont) ing on them, and that was my first time I spoke at a mike, at a convention. But we did receive, we were well-received, I will say that, and we were well supported. And so it was, there really wasn't a problem if we had brought forward those things earlier, I think we would probably have been well received then. I don't really know. Leaderships have changed, and I don't know. But I think there's a whole different understanding; I can remember we asked for a women's conference within the union to, to discuss some of the problems, and we were given a one-day session; there weren't too many women showed up to it. But Jack Moore was leader of the union at that time, and he attended. We had asked for someone from the, and he sat there, and there was two people, Carolyn Gibbons I believe was working for the Fed. at the time, and I'm trying to think, ^{the} Status of Women's Committee, there was a women from there. Any way we just sat, and really it wasn't a meeting, it was a discussion; because there wasn't that many of us there, we sat and we discussed all of the problems that were occurring^r; at that time there was still the hiring problem and this, ^r the other thing. And Jack Moore, I think at first he kind of felt that it was a little bit of a tea party situation, then when he realized, and we started talking seriously about the problem, he was really convinced in just that one meeting. And he was a good supporter, and and as Jack Munroe has been, you know. I think it has changed alot.

SD: Yes.

VL: But I think it was just that they didn't understand before

VL: (cont) that.

SD: Right. Okay. Okay. So how did the men in the union, we've talked a bit about the union leadership, and we've talked about women being in positions of responsibility, like stewards. How did the men react to women in these positions? Did they treat them like other shop stewards? Or did they have even special expectations from them around the kind of work they could accomplish within the union?

VL: I found from the time I started, you know I expected to meet with some problems, but I found from the time I started I was well received. People, men, came to me with their problems. And we were able ^{to} I think when you're on a plant committee, it's a little bit better in a way because you can--when you're successful in a grievance, then people know about it; whereas in safety if you prevented an accident from happening, who knows, you know; so it's not so rewarding as being on a plant committee. But I think that when we were successful, ^{and} we were then the alot of the time in our grievance cases. And of course, ^{words} gets around, that, "well, go to that person, they'll help you out." From then on, I never had any problems; the men always, and the men always supported, well the number of years that Marge has been elected plant chairperson, and that I've been elected secretary, with the amount of men we have now in comparison to women, it proves that we always got a very high vote, so...

SD: Right. Okay. A bit of a shift: you talked before about how when you first became active as a steward you began to challenge management. It sounds like becoming active in the union really changed you life in alot of ways. (laughs) Can you talk about

SD: (cont) that?

VL: It did, it did. It absolutely changed my life: I used to be very, very, I don't know if you'd call it shy, but I was afraid of people, I was, when I first started. I had been married before, and as I mentioned earlier, and I was married at 16, and I don't think I ever grew up very much, until I started to work at PV or Canadian Forest Products, used to be called Pacific Veneer, that's why I said PV. And I was still not an out-going person; I couldn't talk to people without blushing and this kind of thing, and get all hooked up in my words and that. When I, I guess when that fella' came up to me and asked me to be on the safety committee, somehow gave me an idea that, and he told me, "Well we've been paying some attention to some of the things you say to the other girls about union things and we think that you could do the job." And that was the first time I think anybody ever sort of had a little bit of confidence in me. And I didn't have any in myself, but they kept from then on the people in the union were so good about encouraging me to go on. When I first ran for Safety Director of my own local union, that was an elected position. And I, "Oh," I said, "there's no way I can do it!" People said, "Yes, you can!" They encouraged me to run for it, and I did, and I was able to do it. But it was only through that encouragement. But it did, it changed my life completely. And of course I was married for the second time, and my husband at first wasn't very active in the union. And that caused a bit of problems at first, because then I was attending a lot of

VL: (cont) meetings, and he wasn't. And he, but then we sort of sorted that out, and he dec^{id-}, I said to him, "Well look.."
The children were grown, and my daughter left, one year she was married, no my son, I'm sorry, and then^{the} next year my daughter left. And boy, that just leaves you flat. And I said to my husband, "Well look, you know, we've got lots of time on our hands. Now why don't you get active." And he did. And he became a shop steward; and he's also on the plant committee; he's also on the safety committee; he's a trustee of the local union. So he's active; and that's been a big, big help. We both are active in the union. And then, then, they put my name forward for the Regional Safety Director; and I've got that job. So now I'm no longer in the plant. It's a full-time job. But he's still active in the mill.

SD: Did you become politically active, involved in the NDP around the same time you became active in the union? Did one follow on the other, or?

VL: I had always, well I was raised in this CCF family; and so that was always my leanings anyway. I wasn't, and I always voted that way, but I never took an active part until -ah, I guess it was about 1970 before I actually, actively started to participate in the NDP. And I worked during the campaign in '72 when they were elected. And ^{from} then on became quite active. Then became president of Centennial Club I guess about three years ago, and I'm still in that position now. I've been asked to run on a constituency; well I was asked to run for constituency president; well, I wouldn't do that because it's alot of extra

VL: (cont) work; it takes alot of extra time, you know.

SD: Yeah. Once women became stewards, and once they became more activated within the union, were there women's issues that began to get incorporated into contract demands, such as issues around safety conditions, conditions of work, maternity leave, maternity benefits, child care; equal pay and equal work were already there?

VL: The actual, I think I mentioned to you that we had a resolution, we had put forward a resolution one time on hiring practices; and we wanted it negotiated; but however that was, we were able to achieve that through legislation and other ways, and it wasn't negotiated. Except that it says for hiring practice in our contract as well. The other thing is, that we did get was maternity leave, that was one other thing. But it isn't as we would have liked to have seen it, with full paid maternity leave; all it, really just says, "You shall be granted leave for maternity leave." And that, "And shall retain you job on return to work." But no, there isn't really alot of extra things in our contract for women, probably because we haven't-- like I don't know if this is the way it works in other unions, but the local unions put in resolutions; they go then forward to the Wages and Contracts Conference for negotiations; and they're debated there and accepted or rejected. And really...

SD:

VL: Yes, yes. And really we haven't had that many, we haven't put forward that many resolutions, except that one year that we put in, it went to the regional convention, six I think, but as,

VL: (cont) but most of them had to do with legislation. They weren't really contract demands except the maternity leave; and we had asked for full pay as well. Of course we didn't get that; that wasn't, they asked for it during negotiations, but of course didn't get it. It wasn't, wasn't ^{I guess a} priority demand. (laughs)

SD: Yes, that's the thing that people have talked about in other interviews too, is that women sometimes formulate really good demands; but then when negotiations happen, because those demands aren't prioritized...

VL: Yes.

SD: ...then some of them are dropped.

VL: Some of them are dropped, yeah.

SD: Yeah.

VL: That's true, and of course that happens sometimes with safety things too. We have some safety things in our contract you know, such as, mainly on provisions for safety equipment which is provided free of cost. And pay for meetings, safety committee meetings and this kind of thing. Those are things that have been gained of. But safety often isn't a priority either, although it's becoming more, and last time in the negotiations they, there was a demand for research, for money for research, a cent, ^a half a cent per hour per person for research fund. Well we didn't gain it, but it is a serious demand; and they are going to continue with that kind of demand. We hope eventually to be able to set up a research fund.

SD: Right. Do you recall and feel that there were any strikes or actions that took place, which had particular relevance to women within the IWA, who worked in the forest industry?

VL: No, there was the, as I mentioned, there was the job action, we took in our operation over that particular situation, where there was two rates of pay at that time. And then one of the things that happened in, in our local union, or in the plant I worked in, we were having so many problems; this wasn't just related to women; it was problems in general. There was grievances and things had piled up, and everybody was just fed up. There was a young fellow that worked at the operation who had been a teacher, and he just got fed up with teaching, and he was working in a mill for awhile. So we organized a little group; and we got this paper going; and it was called PV Echo. And so, whenever there was issues, particular thi, problems, we would write up articles and circulate this throughout the plant; and it became sort of the ~~in~~ thing if you had one of those in your pocket, especially if you went into management. In fact very often you'd see management with one in their pocket. And some of the women's things ^{were,} I wrote, I was asked to write things on and I wrote up in that paper; and one of them was, that prior to the time we had had the right to any job within the operation. I mentioned this little sit-down we had. So I was asked to write an article on that and I did, and one of the things I said at the end, was how management could solve it by opening all jobs to women. So there was things like that that went on within the, ~~within~~ our own

VL: (cont) operation, talk on some issues of women.

SD: Right. Are there any particular individuals, women who you can think of, either presently in unions, but in particular in the past too, are seen as, or ^{who} you see as playing a really a really significant role in building your union? Other than yourself. (laughs)

VL: (Laughs) Oh god. Well, I would say Marge Storm has done a tremendous job, so you'll hear more about it from her. But she's done a tremendous job for a lot of years and for alot of years she was the only woman struggling along, trying to make changes. And not basically on women's issues; I think she was just a working person who was working very hard for the trade union movement. And, but then after I got active, then we both got interested in some of the problems ^{that} they were having with women, and with the different job rates and this kind of thing. But she's worked very hard and done alot. But really I can't think of anybody elses. (laughs)

SD: Do you think that given the ~~current~~ economic situation, which is one of high unemployment, that women are potentially going to be very *severely* effected by that in the forest industry? That the same kind of implicit policies that management had before of not hiring women, or in the post-war period in some industries of laying off women, might come into effect? Are they coming into effect now?

VL: I haven't seen them coming to effect yet because our industry is really funny; it seems to me that when there is a recession and high unemployment in other areas, the forest industry doesn't

VL: (cont) have that problem. Then the reverse happens, when everything is going pretty good, and I don't understand all the economics of the forest industry, although we've had that in some of our seminars, I still don't understand it too well. But for some reason that happens, ^{and} then when there's, when things are good in other areas, we have our problems with lay-offs and this kind of thing. So I haven't seen that happen; but I am afraid that that will happen; I am afraid that, with, if this rate of unemployment increases, the rate of inflation increases and number of other things. I have seen articles in The Sun, letters you know that, along that line, saying why are women taking jobs and that. Although, the other, on the other hand, there's one other thing, that the young people, the younger people, the younger men that are coming into the work-force, and of course in, where there's a lot of turn-over or used to be, there's not so much turn-over now but where there was a lot of turn-over; we have a lot of young people in our industry--and I don't find that amongst the younger men, they accept the fact that women need to work, in the main, I mean there may be the odd one that doesn't, but in the main they accept it, and they expect probably that their wives will work, or their girlfriends. And so you don't run into that problem so much with them.

SD: Okay, great.

END OF SIDE II

END OF TAPE