

what hard old bags rise up to those jobs. It seems with middle management- I'll take top management any old time. But actually I think they ^{probably} were better.

SD: Things like, if you had sick children at home or issues, like that, / would they be...

SM: Yes, they weren't... ^{I think} they ^{were} probably as good as any work place which meant that...well, you knew it wasn't thought very well of, but on the other hand you knew your job would still be there when you got back, yes. And on occasion well, your supervisor might even phone and ask you how the child was or something, it wasn't thought very well of, but your job would be there.

SD: Was the hospital sensitive to women's needs?

SM: No, not really, no. They were sensitive perhaps to workers' needs in some areas but that might just as well have been a man who phoned and said he couldn't make it, you know. No I don't think they were sensitive...except, don't you think that women supervisors probably are a bit more sensitive to women's needs anyway, than men supervisors? All other things being equal. So probably that was a gain for us women.

SD: Were there women who worked there, did they put forward their needs specifically?

SM: Well, in those days my dear, did you have needs or rights? You didn't really know whether you did or not, did you? So I didn't know I had any needs or rights...perhaps in

the last stages of my working days, but, we were brought up to think that, you know, if you didn't get something it was your own fault. And if you wanted freedom to work, well, why did you get married and have children in the first place, someone would say. You know, this sort of thing. There would be no-one—I don't ever remember asking for help in the areas of my children, but if I had I'm sure I would have been told well, you chose to have these children now, it's just/your tough pretty much luck what you do with them.

SD: Was the majority of the work force female in the hospital?

SM: Oh, yes.

SD: And what kind of work did many women do there?

SM: I think you could probably put it this way. The men did the best paid jobs and the heaviest jobs, which were in many case the same thing you see. And they did the engineering type of jobs, worked with the electrical systems, the heavy maintenance, as I remarked, that is pushing those machines around and that sort of thing. They did the wall washing and the ceiling washing. And the women just did everything else. The men were chefs in the kitchen. There were no women chefs. The lower paid help in the kitchen were all women and the supervisor in the kitchen was a woman, a nurse dietician.

SD: Did women act as porters?

SM: Yea. When I first went there all porters were men with the exception of a Mrs. Doyle on the fourth floor. I

don't know how she came by that job so early but she did. Then, later, they began replacing all these porters with women. After one of the multifarious changes that every year, this was one of my complaints in the hospital, every year we tried something new. Evidently the supervisors don't have enough to do because at these council meetings of theirs, they're able to change everybody's...oh, the job analysis are checked and you're given different things to do and we're doing everything a different way this time. Sterilization is not being carried out the same, so on and so forth. These damn reorganizations. And in one of these reorganizations they took the men porters and gave them other jobs and put womenⁱⁿ. Which was of course a very smart move for them because they didn't have to pay the women as much. In fact, substantially less, \$50 less if my memory serves me right. For the identical job.

SD: Did the union fight that wage reduction at all?

SM: Well, my dear, they were still fighting it when I left.

I don't know what^{ever} came of it because I moved out here you see. I don't see many of the old crowd anymore.

SD: In terms of women in the union, were women active taking officer positions?

SM: Yes. I'd have to say that men and women both ^{Though} ^{were,} within the limitations of shift work, ^{primarily} I think the offices ^{went} to people who worked on one shift steadily. For instance, the laundry girls, there was no

night shift in the laundry and quite a few of the laundry women were on the officers. And when you think that the laundry workers were considered to be not too bright, you know, that was remarkable. But it just explained by this how many people don't have to work shifts in a hospital. So men and women both, I think, served as officers just because they worked days or straight nights, for instance. Swing shift people couldn't, evening shift, they couldn't be officers.

SD: Because of meeting times...

SM: Well, sure.

SD: And were the presidents and business agents male or female?

SM: Well, the president and business agent...now, I can remember one woman president. And the business agent was always male because...I don't think, truly that it was discrimination. We hung onto the same business agent for ages because nobody else could take it. Shifts are much more of a fact of life than you might think in a hospital. And, it had to be a person who wasn't unduly tied with small children and that sort of thing. So as long as Johnny would keep it, we let him. I think we only had two business agents and one drank so much he eventually had to go, and then Johnny got it and he was still there when I left. And I'm sure nobody contested him for it because that was a job that did take a great deal of time and a great deal of freedom.

- SD: Did people feel that they ^{would have} encouraged women to take positions in the union?
- SM: Oh yes, heavens. I can remember positions up for grabs. They would be coming around to you begging you to take such a position. Oh, yea. I thought there was complete freedom there.
- SD: Did the union do various things to try and keep people interested in it?
- SM: Yes, they did. I never thought too much of Johnny and Bob's basic philosophy but there was no doubt about it they were heart and soul in the union. But I questioned whether they, I felt they should have been taking courses themselves in trade unionism to learn to new things to do. You know, this sort of thing. But they didn't. But they did the best they could. They put on parties and had raffles and tried to make union meetings a bit interesting. They'd have the odd speaker in.
- SD: Did you have an education committee?
- SM: Yes, I was chairman of the education committee. And I tried to bring old films/ⁱⁿfrom B.C. Fed and this sort of thing, and teach labour history a bit. Learning at the same time of course.
- SD: Was there any political education at all in the union?
- SM: No. We had old Bill Black. Do you remember Bill Black, Hospital Workers? He always had a saying about socialism, 'Never give a name to it.' And before each election, for

instance, I mean Provincial or Federal not union, he would get up and roar at great lengths. He was a small small man but he had a great big voice and he would roar at great lengths telling you everything but the name of the party to vote for. We used to kinda sit and snicker. Never give it a name, he would say, never give it a name. But he was a socialist of course. I think he did a great deal of good although everybody sort of laughed at him in a sense. But I think he probably did a great deal of good.

(end of Tape I)

Tape 2. Side I.

SD: We were talking about political education. So the union didn't endorse a particular political party?

SM: Well, no not as a union but I believe largely they did support the NDP. And made it quite plain, the officers talking individually, ..most of them I'd say.

SD: Were there political organizations involved in the union at all? Were there people there from CCF, the CP, the Liberal party and so on who were...

SM: No, not really. I had people from the CCF and CP and would have gone on to have them from the other parties but my term of office came to an end and I just didn't feel I could take it on again.

SD: What was the name of the union?

SM: That is the thing...the Hospital Workers. Now, that is the

thing I've just cursed myself for. One of these days I'm going to have to go and hunt up my union button to find our name. A union that I was heart and soul in for years.

SD: Was it the Hospital Employees Union?

SM: B.C....B.C.H.E.U., yes, right. Isn't that ridiculous. But we were always just the Hospital Workers.

SD: Were you on the executive at all?

SM: Yes. I was a trustee I believe twice. And I was warden. Just that, because at that time I had my children fairly young, you know, some of them still and I wouldn't take anything too demanding.

SD: Were you involved in the CCF then?

SM: Oh yes, but not too much. No. Just lending my home for garden parties and attending meetings when I could, which wasn't that often. And doing the odd thing, baking and things like this. Helping at sales. Scrutineering at election times, this sort of thing.

SD: Did the CCF have any sort of structures for trade union work at all?

SM: Not nearly as much as the NDP, no. Trade union people were welcome, more than welcome, but I wasn't involved to ^{the} point in the CCF that I knew what the structures were really. But by no means as much as the NDP.

SD: When did you become involved working with the CCF?

SM: 1960, oh no, the NDP was 1961, the new party, 1960 rather.

CCF was when we lived up at 23rd and Quebec, perhaps 1957, something like that.

SD: Would the trade unions go to the CCF for support around trade union issues?

SM: My dear, really I didn't know whether they went. You know, I wasn't involved in CCF to the point that I could tell you that. The NDP, they did, of course.

SD: Were there very many women involved in the union at the hospital?

SM: Oh yes, I'd say probably, ^{probably,} a third men and two thirds women, or between that and half and half at all times.

And then there were a great many women who were involved to the point of helping at things, you know, social affairs or picnics and that sort of thing. Oh, yea. In a minor way.

SD: When you tried to schedule meetings to try and involve the people who worked there would you try and have people book time off or...

SM: Well, that was more or less left to the person. The officers could quite often get off, at least the table officers of course could get off. But I don't believe there's any specific provision ^{made} by the union for the minor officers, no.

SD: Was it difficult for people in the hospital to leave work?

SM: Sort of, yea.

SD: Why would that be?

SM: Well, because of continuity. All we heard was continuity of patient care, and of course, this is a fact of life. It's a thing that's necessary. Everyone should be able to think that, or have roughly the same set of nurses treating them all the time. And of course, that goes for other staff, you know. Changing isn't that good. So it is more difficult in a hospital than anywhere else I think, and discontinuity isn't recommended at all.

SD: Were shifts a problem specifically for women, for example, in terms of children.

SM: Well, definitely. They are a great deal of a problem also for the father of the family in the sense that he wouldn't see his children sometimes for weeks while he was on his shift. But especially for the mother, of course. Because the mother has to be up when her children are up regardless of what hour she got to sleep the night before. It can't be done, to try to sleep when your children are awake. Especially if they're small.

SD: Did women talk a lot about the problem of children?

SM: Oh, well, of course they did. Yes. They have since women ^{ever} started to work I think. But it was then considered your problem. You didn't have rights, you know. You didn't think about having rights. Deep down you'd think, well there must be a way, but it was never done, you know.

SD: Did women try various solutions for...

SM: ^{Oh,} Well of course. They tried babysitters, daycares, this sort

of thing. Sleep-in older ladies with free room and board for night care of children, this sort of thing, yes.

SD: Did the hospital ever shift people ^{to shifts} suddenly?

SM: Oh yes, all of a sudden this would be...mind you the union had control of a certain amount of this. And after the union got in of course, it was much better. There had to be a sort of halfway rational explanation given then.

SD: Were there split shifts as well?

SM: Not too much. In the early days there were. That I know - though I never had to work on one and to tell you the truth I don't remember talking to anyone who did. But we knew in the diet kitchen, we heard that in the diet kitchen there were split shifts. People coming in to help over the lunch hour and over the dinner hour.

SD: When you became a nursing unit clerk was that a steady day job?

SM: Um hum. Until the last year and a half. It was also made shifts, two shifts, day and evening. And that was just about when I called a halt and retired myself because I found after that short a time I just couldn't take it. I just wasn't sleeping anymore.

SD: Did people suffer medical and psychological problems from shift work?

SM: I'm sure they did. While I can't give any specific instances I'm sure that they did. It's obvious; marriages were broken up over it, that I know. I've heard of these things. Oh, yes

that happens in every place where there is shifts? I'm sure of it.

SD: Because people don't see each other.

SM: Oh, sure. Because as well you have got to have continuity in family life too, don't you? You've got to have standards and customs and this sort of thing. So I think shift work must be disastrous for a marriage, especially a new marriage. Perhaps one that's old and stable perhaps can stand the extra pull, but...

SD: Did most^{of} the personnel in the hospital oppose shift work?

SM: They disliked it, yes, badly. But there's not much use talking of opposing it, you know. What can you do about it? It's there. But there were various issues that sprang up over the fact that you shouldn't change people from days to nights, you should change them from days to afternoons and then from afternoons to nights. This sort of thing. That they couldn't arbitrarily say you worked this shift. There were rotations worked out.

SD: And were any shift workers on the executive, ever?

SM: I don't believe so, because I just wouldn't know how they could do it. But people who just had two shifts like me perhaps they could manage. But that was pretty difficult at that. I missed meeting after meeting that I literally couldn't go to, let alone once I might be sick or something. It would be pretty hard, I wouldn't...if I were on shift

I wouldn't run for the executive. I might finish out my turn perhaps.

SD: And was there a ^{strong} steward structure in the union?

SM: Oh, yes fairly strong I thought. Umhum.

SD: Was there...let's see you mentioned that there was a rally about Lockmark?

SM: Oh, yes.

SD: Can you describe it?

SM: The whole hospital turned out, that is, as many people at one time who could be spared. And when they went back, another lot came out. We marched around and around about the blocks, waving placards 'Lockmark must go' and so on. The first time I ever picketed with a doctor.
(laughter)

SD: Why did that action take place?

SM: Because he cut the budget or, to be exact, he didn't cut the budget but he announced that we had to live on the original budget which was five years previous and of course, it had been impossible to live on it for at least three or four years so you can imagine the alarm when this budget came out and we found out we were only getting what we'd had. That was the fixed budget the Socred's had at the time, and your budget was fixed for x number of years. They reviewed it every year, but of course there were things they never raised it for and one was hospital care of course.

SD: And what year was, in '71?

SM: Approximately, yes, '70 or '71.

SD: I can remember at one time hearing a statement from one of the men in the hospital, he said that he'd heard in the business office that if it wasn't for our suppliers we would have been bankrupt. They said at any time, Malkins, Nabob, Woodward's and so on were literally carrying us for a year with bills that we were totally unable to pay.

SD: What kind of grievances did people bring to the union?

SM: Oh, grievances about jobs that had been given them that they thought didn't belong in their classification. That the supervisors were beginning to ignore the boundaries of the classifications and about hours. Disputes over hours. Disputes over pay that they thought that they had worked more hours or something. Just this general type of thing. I can't remember many others. In the early days there were the odd anti-union remark that people would bring in a grievance about, being spoken to on account of their union activity, but that couldn't have been very major. I don't remember that much about it, once or twice I can.

SD: Was technical innovation a problem in the hospital with *new* machinery coming in?

SM: No. Not really. Let me think. I don't think so. Hospitals are necessarily a job of hand work. I don't think

there'll ever, for years, be much diminution in that, you know, it's largely hand work, person work. ^{No,} I can't remember anything.

SD: Did the issue of equal pay come up at all?

SM: It came up periodically. Nothing. Nothing. We were brought a little closer towards it perhaps. I can remember one time when the raise for women was a bit higher than the raise for men. In an effort to catch up.

SD: Was there consciousness in the union of the need for women to receive equal wages?

SM: Oh, yes there was consciousness about it, but, I can't remember anything too radical being done about it.

SD: Were there other women's issues like maternity leave that came up?

SM: No, not that I can remember.

SD: Did people look to the union to solve their problems, or was the maternalism a problem.

SM: Well, it took a great many years. People would instinctively find themselves going to their supervisors and would think to themselves, oh my gosh, what did I do that for. I think it was a kind of unconscious thing. But I think in the end the union probably...one of their great problems they weren't conscious enough about training and the shop stewards weren't trained nearly well enough.

I thought that a couple of them quite often settled their problems just themselves, you know. And perhaps girls^{OR} people, who weren't too conscious of it, perhaps didn't realize that...thought that that was the big word sent down from the union executive, you know. I don't think that any of the union did a good enough job of training. No. But by and large they functioned fairly well.

SD: The women who played a central role in the union, were they were mostly single women or single parents, or?

SM: No, actually, just *a spectrum*.

SD: Were there social events that the union organized?

SM: Umhum, quite a few. We had a dance every year. For years we had a picnic until the picnic idea seemed to fall through in every group, didn't it? Various, a dinner at Christmas type-thing.

SD: Were there any job actions that the union organized?

SM: I can't remember any. No. One time we got so far as to actually discuss a strike but I think that was settled before it got to be too much of a hassle. And I mean, You've got to remember the hospital had it kind of easy in^a way. They could almost promise us anything, because the government would take care of that, you know. The hospital had it quite easy. You see; what was to stop the hospital board from saying, god, double their wages. There was nothing to stop them really, because BCHIS wouldn't

put up with it.

SD: You mean, they wouldn't realize the wages that had been promised to you.

SM: No, no. Of Course not. The budget was the last word on it and when the budget came out, it was quite obvious that you were going to be lucky to get any kind of a raise so I mean, that had a great deal to do with it too, I think. The feeling that there's not much use asking for much more because you just weren't going to get it. And when you can't blame and strike against the board of directors, there doesn't seem too much point against striking does there? More job action should have been taken against the Provincial Government, yes. No doubt about it.

SD: Did the union work at all with other public sector unions around some of those issues?

SM: We belonged to CUPE at one time and we got out and I never quite understood why we got out. All of a sudden, I missed a meeting or two, I suppose I couldn't get there, and we were out of CUPE and I never did know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing.

SD: Did becoming active in the union change your life?

SM: Oh, well not too much. Gave it a new dimension perhaps but not too much, no. It made be busier I can tell you that.

SD: Was that because you'd had a strong political identity...

SM: Well, yes certainly I'd had a strong trade union and political identity before because my ex-husband was a trade union man, so I didn't need converting really.

SD: What was your husband's attitude towards you being active in the union?

SM: Well, me being active in anything outside, his attitude wasn't good but the union not specifically, no.

SD: Did he see any contradictions in him being active in his union and...

SM: Oh well, there were plenty of contradictions, one just the wife, that wasn't her place. You've no idea what an incredible atmosphere women worked in. I mean, to the point where they accepted this sort of thing. I accepted it for a great many years, well, I just couldn't, that's all.

SD: What kind of attitudes were there ^{in that time} towards women working and having the right to have a job?

SM: Well, I believe that always women at a certain level there's a mass approval of them working perhaps, when you get a little higher up and it's a career maybe you have no right to a career, but you always had the right to do the dirty work for society and it's very much approved of really. That someone's puttering around doing this dirty work.

SD: And did attitudes change from the '30's, through to the '50's

and '60's towards women working?

SM: Yes, because I believe ^{then} more women got into every level of work. There weren't many in management perhaps but certainly more than there were in the '30's. I believe it was here to stay in other words, I think the war did that, I really do.

SD: Why was that?

SM: Well, women were needed during the war, desperately needed. They had to go to work, and so many of them did and worked for so many years and it became just a part of their life. Well actually their families attitude towards women working has changed, eh? Their children's attitude, if they had had any attitude before, would be changed. So the next generation of course would accept women working, well sure, most women work, you know. It was more or less a foreseen thing.

SD: How about after the war, was there an attempt to get women back to the home?

SM: Oh, right after, yes. Until they found that somehow the economy was absorbing these returning men at a fast enough rate that there weren't going to be riots in the streets. When they found that out, because there was a boom after the war, the returned men were absorbed pretty quickly I thought and then of course, they left the girls alone again for awhile.

SD: What kind of things did they sort of say about women...

SM: Well, have babies. That was the beginning of the baby boom. Have lots and lots and lots of babies, you know. It serves two purposes, it gives your job to a man if he wants it plus it kind of settles you down a bit, your're not going to do too much high flying when you're pregnant or nursing or anything else, you know. It makes for stability my dear. (laughter) We fell ^{for} it, of course, we fell ^{for} it. I had four children I thought I was doing something wonderful.

SD: Lots of work, that's what you were doing.

SM: (laughter) But you know, later you get thinking and you realize the whole thing was a damn put on and sponsored by the women's magazines. And that was the end of my acquaintainship with women's magazines except for Chatelaine.

SD: What kind of things did they have in them, like articles on...

SM: Like articles on Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so with their bonny ten children and what's more their fostering seven more, you know and this sort of thing. And how wonderful it was and with it all the house was immaculate and the stress that was put on the physical part of your living, your home, your cooking. They just did their level best to keep you busy at things they thought you should be busy at,

SD: And did they kindof have the attitude that if women had to work it was secondary to...

SM: Oh, yes, yes definitely. Your main thing in those days was keeping your husband happy don't forget. That was the big deal, keeping him happy that was even ahead of those children.

SD: Did the women you know work, most of them?

SM: Yea, I guess so, a fair share of them. When I first started to work, no. I was the only one of our group that worked but later on yes, practically every one.

SD: What was the attitude towards women being active in the unions then?

SM: Well, fairly...well, I don't think many women wanted to but I mean on the other hand, if you wanted to, if that's what turned you on they didn't care that much. I wouldn't have made any enemies with my union work among women but I don't think many women wanted to, just ordinary women.

SD: Was there a hostility towards women who stood up and spoke for themselves?

SM: Not from the union there wasn't, no. In fact, you were quite admired if you did.

SD: What about outside of it though, in society?

SM: I think...are we talking about the 30's, 40's, and 50's...

SD: Yea, and the changes. . .

SM: In the 30's, it would be approved of more because times were desparately hard. And people were more rational,

you know, they had more time to think. But in the 40's or 50's I think we were still in the era that the least noise a woman made the more feminine she was and of course, the feminine women was very desirable. I think that was the attitude largely. Still even in the 50's you should be ladylike.

SD: Were many of the women politically involved in the rank and file who were unionists?

SM: Not too many, no. Not too many. A few of our friends belonged to the party like I did. Not too many. Not, I'd say, average not. But you know there's a lot of immigrant women who no matter where they are, won't become involved in politics because they're not supposed to really, till they get their citizenship, eh? Because if they do they could be deported if anything happened, you know, so we suffered from that a certain amount. There's no doubt of it.

SD: Was there a sort of social milieu of hospital workers, did people spend time...

SM: Yes, quite a bit. I didn't so much, yes I did in a way. Three of us hung out together. Yea, I think so. There are in most plants, I think, too.

SD: In terms of working in the laundry, I remember you said you hurt your shoulder, was that kind of thing common were people would have...

SM: Yea, it was pretty hard and I would say, I bet you, that

not many laundry people don't end up with rheumatism or arthritis, this sort of thing. It was very damp, steamy work. At one moment you were exposed to these tremendous temperatures, the next moment you'd be stuck outside to go home in freezing weather, this sort of thing. Yea, I think it had an effect.

SD: Were there problems because of the number of different

*description
of accident?*

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ethnic groups in the work force and new immigrants, in terms of English as a language.

SM: Well, no because they had such a good staff of interpreters so, if ~~the~~ the worse came to the worse and the boss for instance, or foreman, found some person wasn't understanding him well enough to do his work he could always call an interpreter, eh? They had a very large lot of interpreters there, every language you ^{can} conceive of.

SD: When you look back on the experience of being involved in the union, do you think that it met the needs of the women, the workers it was trying to serve?

SM: Well, in a way it satisfied the needs of women, in a small way, because the women learned that you could fight for a thing and be terribly frightened you weren't going to get it and even frightened of reprisal and yet you could get it. You actually could. And that did a great many of them a lot of good I'm sure of it. Just that experience that, honestly, *some* of those girls would be frightened of their own shadow if they wanted to speak to you they'd ask you to come into the toilet, even when it wasn't necessary really. But to find that workers could fight for something and stick together and fight for it and get it, I think it did everyone good, I'm sure. It gave you more confidence.

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- SD: Would you think ^{there} was a problem in terms of women being able to articulate their needs?
- SM: Oh yes. Because as I say, none of our age group were brought up to think that we should have any needs and if we did have, it was a fault in ourselves and we should keep quiet about it, you know.
- SD: Is there anything else you would like to say about...
- SM: Well, I can't think of too much except, you know, the days when women were physically kept down is long down. When I was born even. There's no such thing as women not being able to move quite freely about anytime they felt like it, but there was still emotional kind of strains you know, so that I consider my life as a child a very inhibited one on the sense of my womanhood. I definitely felt inferior to not only my brothers but to every other boy and that carried over a great many years. I think the average woman did. I didn't know in those days what I would now call a self-confident woman. Didn't know one.
- SD: It seems though that you went through a real shift from when you were first working and felt that you couldn't be active in the union, didn't have anything to give, to later on...
- SM: Oh yes, I was in my 40's before I felt that I had anything to offer ^{anyone} except my family and my friends. I couldn't

have stood up on a platform and spoken to save my life, Couldn't have done it. And, I was in my 40's before I realized through the trade union, through my political work that I had something to offer. People were actually listening to what I said, you know. So that was 40 wasted years. My daughters never felt that way, and believe me my grand daughters don't. They have something to say right now and you had better listen, you know. They're people. It's wonderful.

SD: noise on tape

SD: You had said that you had gone to the Communist party bookstore occasionally...

SM: Yes, I used to go there and pick up material to read.

SD: Right, and did you know of Communist party members...

SM: Oh, I knew half a dozen individual communists and the union that my ex-husband worked with at the time, his union was the Marineworkers and Boilermakers, who had communist leadership.

SD: Oh, they were very active...

SM: Very active, very good union.

SD: Was he sympathetic to them at all?

SM: Oh, not at all except they did very well by their members.

SD: You were mentioning that you had Paul Robeson records.

SM: Oh yes, I have a huge collection. I must have fifty or more records and the Communist Party used to borrow them

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because in those days they couldn't get him across the border at all. So, one occasion I remember, it was just before Christmas one year, and I can't even tell you what year it was, but in the 50's and they had a big

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reconstituted

...and was really, really incredible. The other nuns were very quiet, meek, ladylike appearing women and Sister Gertrude strode around with her lame leg and this cane, just strode around like a man, so self-confidently, all the other women admired her tremendously. On occasion she used the odd bad word and she was very sympathetic to the union, ^{though,} / I wonder how much of that was philosophical and how much was on the basis of the fact that the hospital needed us to go to bat with B.C.H.I.S. with them, but nevertheless she was very sympathetic to the union, and as I mentioned before, often I've wondered if she wasn't a communist literally.

SD: Did she have other sort of policies that were progressive?

SM: All her policies...well I couldn't name specific policies but it was a well-discussed fact that she brought a far more humane and efficient organization to her duties in the hospital. She was a modern woman, while an old, old women, she was a completely modern woman probably the

best educated of any of the sisterhood there.

SD: So that would affect patient care in terms of the kind of...

SM: Not exactly, because she wasn't in charge of patient care. She was in charge of administration. It would affect the staff far more than it would the patient though of course, it would have an indirect affect. But not any direct bearing on patient care.

SD: You also said earlier that you really enjoyed working.

SM: Yes, I have. I can truthfully say that I haven't had a job I disliked because there's always something about a job. Mostly a lot of the jobs I had when I still had to work specific hours, most of the jobs I had were jobs that just demanded no intelligence whatsoever so you work and let your mind drift off, and of course, no one who hasn't had young children knows how good it is to be away from your young children, not responsible for them at all, their being taken care of by someone else but you and you're free for the time being.

SD: Did you enjoy the physical labour?

SM: Yes, I do. I still do. I do a vast amount of physical labour right now and I do enjoy it.

SD: In terms of the working situation, was part of what made the job enjoyable the kind of camaraderie that existed?

SM: Yes, I believe so too. Especially in the laundry where the girls tend to be a more rough and ready lot from all kinds of elements of society, some quite dubious actually. It was ~~really~~ great fun, great fun. I enjoyed it.

SD: What kind of things would you do, do you remember? At work?

SM: Just chatting and playing practical jokes and this sort of thing. There was always some excitement going on in the laundry because we were in a separate building and administration of the hospital didn't concern ~~it~~ itself too much with us.

SD: So you could have almost control of your working environment?

SM: Yes, we didn't have to be quiet. All the hospital workers had to be quiet. You keep a lower^{ed} voice in hospital corridors but the laundry girls were just a rangatang lot, we didn't have to do anything particularly except work like slaves. It was enjoyable.

SD: Did that help to build the feeling of resistance and militancy...

SM: Oh, I think it built solidarity, because we knew what the others thought of us. That we were pretty well the dregs of society that would be doing that kind of work but on our side we had the fact that we had the best hours

Sara McKinnon

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and were the best paid of all the women workers because it was so hard to get people who could do that sort of thing even if they would, it was very hard work. And we felt we were the superior one but those fools didn't know it, you know. There was always that kind of feeling. I enjoyed the laundry very much. You certainly met people there that you'd never meet anywhere else.

SD: Does that mean that people spent time socially/outside with each other of it sometimes?

SM: Not too much really. It was largely a work relationship but of course, you know. You were just in constant contact at work with so many of them, your whole team were together.

SD: Was the operation organized as a team?

SM: No, but there were teams. There were the rough dry ironers, the mangle team, of course, worked as a team, the rough dryers all did, the rough dry operator and the sorters all worked as a team.

SD: So you were saying all kinds of people worked during the war.

SM: Oh yes. Because in wartime the government just put everyone to work. They just put out dragnets of police you know and simply hauled everybody into work. Say, for instance, you were a prostitute, the whole thing would be overlooked if you got a job, so that you might work with a girl for sometime

and not find out till later that she was a prostitute and meanwhile you'd got very fond of this person. So it was good for you in the sense it taught you there was, you know, the same kind of people at all levels. Formerly we had thought these people were just a different kind and I think the experience invaluable to find out that there are good people and bad people at no matter what level of society. But it was fascinating to see these people jumping for jobs. I can still remember when I worked at Hastings Street in a restaurant, night work and of course we had the pimps and everybody coming in, they would be holding a party of celebration for one. I remember one called Boxcar Johnson, he'd had his word. He had to have a job by next Monday, so they were celebrating his last minutes of freedom at this party. It was just fascinating really. I've often thought I should write.

SD: Oh yes. How did those people adjust to working like?

SM: Well actually, not very well of course. But it was a fact, you had to do it. The kind of pressure that was put on you is if you weren't working and you couldn't get relief of course, well quite obviously you were doing something that they could grab you for doing, so you had just better keep working and if you wanted to keep up your little private enterprise you did it on the side. Because, they just simply knew what you were doing. If you weren't working you were doing something wrong. It

SD: Because of the high level of unemployment?

SM: Oh yes because the factories were desperate. All the war industries were desperate for people all through the war.

SD: Was there a lot of surveillance during the war, of what people were doing?

SM: I would think the ordinary person wouldn't feel it but I imagine these people ^{did} oh yes, I imagine they did. Don't forget these were people who were in and out of jail on one charge or another a great deal of their lives. Probably more in their younger days before they learned the angles, so I imagine they felt it, Yes, I imagine they were made to feel it.

SD: Another question of the war period, ^{was,} were you ever in the women's auxiliary from the shipyards union or?

SM: There was a women's auxiliary in the shipyards union and I can't remember that I was ever a member though I did go to functions but at that time, don't forget, I had four very tiny children and I was pregnant in the last years of the war so I wasn't doing much of any kind. I remember going down helping to picket when the women's auxiliary did at the Sterling Shipyards, I believe it was.

SD: Why were they picketing?

SM: Oh well, because the men were picketing and evidently the men were having a rough time picketing and the idea was the women wouldn't be roughed and savaged you know, by these

goons the companies always had.

SD: Do you know why the men went out? Because there was a
no strike pledge at the time?

SM: My dear, I can't remember why they went out. I really
don't.

END OF SIDE II

SD: Tell me your name, and a bit about the story of when you moved to B.C. and why.

SM: My name is Sara McKinnon. I moved to B.C. in 1937, actually just to visit an uncle, and just liked the country and never did go back.

SD: And did you work before you came here?

SM: Yes I had worked, but largely, but, oh, I worked for a doctor at one time, and otherwise I just did hospital work, very small amount of hospital work before I married, and restaurant jobs, that sort of thing.

SD: Right. And where did you come to in British Columbia?

SM: To Stewart Island.

SD: That's about 180 miles up the coast, just past Lund a ways.

SD: And what kind of work did you do there?

SM: Oh, I just visited my uncle there, stayed there all summer, then came down in the fall to Vancouver.

SD: Why did you decide to stay in B.C.?

SM: Oh, I can't tell you. I loved the water; I loved the scenery just loved it!

SD: Was it at a time when a lot of young people were travelling?

SM: No, perhaps it was, but mainly boys. I didn't know too many girls who left home, no. And as I say, I probably wouldn't have left that district either, except for being invited to visit my uncle.

SD: And what was your first job in British Columbia?

SM: Restaurant work, I believe.

SD: Do you remember where that was?

SM: Yes, Peter Pan restaurant on Granville Street.

SD: Was it a union shop at all?

SM: No, I don't believe at that time, no. I worked there later, you see, and it was a union shop then, but I don't believe when I first worked there, no. I worked there night shift because I had, you know, Depression you took what you could get, and then later I had small children, so I stayed on night shift.

SD: Right. And when did you marry?

SM: 1937.

SD: Did you continue to work after you were married?

SM: Yes, well first of all, we spent our first summer up the coast fishing; my husband had a fishing boat, and we spent the summer up there, and ^{then,} in the fall when we came down I believe I started to work again.

SD: Did you work on the fish boat?

SM: Oh yes, oh yes. It was a trawler just a one-man boat, but whatever there was to do I did. And I learned to steer actually, and I learned to navigate the Inside Passage!

SD: Were there other women working on the boat?

SM: Oh yes, a great many. There were no jobs in town, and if your husband fished, you know, quite a few of the younger women especially, I don't remember any older women, but younger women especially, often went up.

SD: And was there any organization on the boats, of workers?

SM: Oh, a trade union. Oh yes, a very good one, in those

SM: (cont) days. It was a UFAWU, but by another name then, I don't remember what the name was, but my husband was an official of the union. Oh, all the time, one thing or another thing.

SD: So were you involved in union activities?

SM: Oh, no I can't say I was, except just perhaps making calls on people to tell them when the meeting was going to be, or something. We would take the boat to this little village, and he would take half ^{of them,} and I would take the other, to alert the men, to an emergency type meeting. This sort of thing, that's all.

SD: And did other women participate at all in union activities within the Auxiliary?

SM: There was an Auxiliary, but those things were mostly town based actually. But I'm not even sure if the cannery workers were in the union then, which might have led to more local organization because they were, more or less living in one place. I'm not sure if they were.

SD: Why did you leave your job in Vancouver finally?

SM: Oh I suppose I got pregnant, you know, I worked, as each child got old enough to leave, I suppose I left it because of pregnancy, I can't remember.

SD: Did your husband support, feel that you should not work while you had children?

SM: Oh, he didn't like me to work, period, whether I had children or not, but as long as I worked night shift, I mean he had nothing to say because obviously, I wasn't neglecting

SM: (cont) the children.

SD: What kind of work did he do after you came down to Vancouver?

SM: He was a shipwright.

SD: Was there ~~work~~ work in the shipyards during the Depression?

SM: No, not very much, no, no. Not very much. What there was he got, but...

SD: Why did you finally return to work?

SM: Oh, money, of course (laughs). You know we were just barely making it, and that just wasn't good enough for me with children, growing up, you know, I thought there were certain things they should have, and so I went, to work.

SD: Were you trying to buy a home?

SM: Oh yes, always, always; and it just couldn't be done unless the wife worked, and sometimes no even then.

SD: How many children were there in the family?

SM: Four, in my own family, two boys, two girls.

SD: How did you deal with child-care while you were working?

SM: Just as I say, worked nights, and I had the children in bed, by the time I left, or perhaps sitting'round the radio listening to it, and my husband looked after them at night.

SD: And did you ever need to look for baby-sitters?

SM: Oh, no. We refused to have baby-sitters except for the rare occasions we went out socially. That was one rule I made, I'd never leave the children with steady baby-sitters. There wasn't the proper set-up at that time; there were no trained baby-sitters available, you just

SM: (cont) asked some neighbor's girl to look after them, and I didn't approve of that as a steady thing.

SD: ^{working} other than ~~as~~ a waitress in a restaurant, did you ever work as a domestic?

SM: Oh yes, many times during Depression years, especially in the east.

SD: What were the conditions like, and the hours?

SM: (laughs) Hopeless! Hopeless, of course! Very little wages, and the old story about them wanting to take half of your pay in their cast-on clothes, ^{this} is all true, every word of it, (laughs a little) the conditions were really hopeless. You were lucky if you didn't in your, the family after you as well, very, very lucky if you didn't, especially if you were, sort of, semi-attractive. I know some of the girls had a rough time with that, the pretty ones.

SD: Was it a good job for women with kids?

SM: Probably yes, probably, I would think. A live-in domestic, if anyone would take a woman with children, was probably a fair job for women with kids, in the context of the Depression, that is, because they would both eat well, and the mother could supervise them. I couldn't say because I didn't take that sort of situation.

SD: How did you find domestic jobs? Did you go to Manpower?

SM: Well first you went to Manpower, that was it. And then one woman recommended you to another, sort of thing. You just went to Manpower once, and then you had more jobs than you could handle. And it was good, because

SM: ^ that sort of job, there was no training period for it, so consequently if a child fell ill, you could always phone and say, "Well I'm just not coming in, today." Phone the next woman tomorrow, "I'm not coming in." and so on. Oh I presume they could have found someone else but they didn't seem to, so it was a very good job that way.

SD: Was there any organization of domestics?

SM: No, none whatsoever.

SD: When did you work there, was that during the war?

SM: Yes, during the war, and probably a year or two after, late '40's, probably the late '40's, during the war and the late '40's.

SD: When did you begin to look for another permanent job?

SM: When the children got in school. By that time, my friend, a neighbor of ours, just across from the school was running a day-care centre, and I took the opportunity then to do this, to take a permanent job and have the children, my youngest boy was the only one really at that time. He would go from school to her place. So that gave me real freedom for the first time. But actually I was home one-half to an hour after the children were, because hospital hours are from seven until three. So there was no great time span before I got home.

SD: Where were you working at?

SM: At the General, I believe; I worked five years at the General.

SD: What kind of job did you have there?

SM: I worked in the laundry, and in the diet kitchen.

SD: What kind of work did you do in the laundry?

SM: 'Rough Dry Operator'.

SD: What is that?

SM: Run the rough dry machines.

SD: And is that when the material comes out of the washing machine?

SM: Everything that doesn't get ironed, put through the mangle, like sheets, things like that all get put through the mangle, but rough linen, the surgery gowns, patient gowns and that, they are just dried and folded.

SD: So is that very hot and heavy?

SM: Oh it's very hot and very heavy. Oh yes, it was nothing in a temperature of 103, 104, nothing at all. You get used to it, it's amazing! We didn't feel it after awhile, at least not the same. The odd person would faint, but you didn't really feel it, not in the way you'd think.

SD: Did it affect people's health at all, working *there* ?

SM: Over all I don't think so; it didn't affect mine, perhaps it did some others, but not mine I don't feel.

SD: Was it both men and women who worked in the laundry?

SM: Oh yes, but very few men. I'd say, in the General, each shift I don't really believe there'd be more than five or six men to, 30-40 women.

SD: And there were different shifts?

SM: Yeah, three shifts. Well actually at the General, to begin with, there were just two shift, and they closed down after

SM: (cont) ll at night, but later there were three.

SD: And what work did the men do, was it the same as the women?

SM: Substantially, the washing floor.

SD: Right. What kind of work did you do in the diet kitchen?

SM: Just trays, setting up trays, delivering trays, putting them in the elevators.

SD: What were the wages like?

SM: Poor. I can't remember just what they were, but they were pretty well rock-bottom. Vancouver General, strangely enough was unionized at the time, so their wages were better than anyone else's but no wages were good in those days, no women's wages.

SD: Were there any benefits or other...?

SM: Well, paid holidays, this sort of thing. The fringe benefits were sort of, but I missed out on everything because they had a very neat dodge: the second shift, which is what I had to work, you see, they put you all on as part-time workers, then you would work say 39 hours a week. If there was danger of you working later, you would be sent home. So they wouldn't have to pay you any fringes at all, or give you any fringes. (laugh) .

SD: Why did you decide to leave Vancouver General?

SM: Oh actually, just to live, work closer to home. At that time we lived in the West End.

SD: And where did you go to then in terms of employment?

SM: In the laundry.

SD: Of St. Paul's?

SM: Yes, of St. Paul's.

SD: And was the work the same there?

SM: Mhmn, yeah.

SD: As VGH?

SM: Mhmn. Less of it that's all.

SD: After you had worked in the laundry, where did you ^{then} move to?

SM: To the wards, as a nursing unit clerk.

SD: What kind of job was that?

SM: Oh, desk work. One stood all day, ~~stood~~, can you imagine this! How archaic! Behind the nurse's desk all day, and did, checked on the charts, that the charting was done properly, transcribed the doctors orders, ordered medications, ordered tests, ordered physical items for the ward's stationery, this sort of thing. Made appointments for X-Ray and Physio and Lab and so on.

SD: Why did you decide to move from the laundry to that place?

SM: Well, you know, ^I had more freedom then. The children were getting older and I could take a job that entailed a little more training and planning, you know.

SD: Was the hospital mostly staffed by women?

SM: Mhmn. Oh, yes. Every hospital is. I couldn't tell you the porportion exactly, but preponderantly women, very few men. The cleaning department: the cleaning machines were run by men, that is, the floor scrubbers and waxers and things like that, but the rest of ~~the~~ work was done by women cleaners.

SD: Were there different nationalities or ethnic groups?

SM: Oh, yes, a very wide variety, very wide, every color, every kind. It was marvellous really. Just marvellous! We had Turks, Egyptians, East Indians, Philipppines. Great many nurses were from the Philipppines. And Cuban, American, English, German, Russian, Ukrainian, just name it, we had it. An enormous list, it was marvellous really. I think that's the sort of job a woman comes to who emigrates and perhaps doesn't have very good English. Perhaps she was something else overseas, but she can't speak English very well, perhaps a great many of them. I've always thought that's where they come, is to jobs like that.

SD: Were there conflicts at all between the different groups?

SM: No, I can truthfully say, apart from a little bitchery in between times you know, I can truthfully say I don't remember any conflicts. The discipline's fairly severe in the hospital, not necessarily the discipline from the bosses; I mean the idea you must keep quiet around the patients. The patients mustn't hear or be exposed to anything that will upset them and I think that the habit gets ingrained; you don't hear dissension in the hospital among anyone, as a rule.

SD: Was there heavy supervision in St. Paul's?

SM: Well, yes, yes there was. It was pretty tight. I don't remember heavy in the sense of angry or cross exactly but it was pretty tight, yeah.

SD: Going back a bit, how did you own consciousness around trade unionism develop?

SM: I can't think why, except that I classed myself politically with the UFO, which later amalgamated with the CCF; it was an agrarian radical party. The literature of the '30's was great for trade unionism; it was terrific; every-one was radical; ^{there was} a great many people, writers were Communists and so on. And it was just a great time to become conscious of labour, so I suppose that had a certain amount to do with it. I can remember specific examples, for instance, *Waiting For Lefty*, you couldn't say that, I mean *Lefty*, you couldn't say that this wasn't politically conscious, and Clifford O'Dette's plays.

SD: What was the United Farmers, UFO, do you remember?

SM: Just an agrarian party, slightly radical, well you know, farmers' radical, yeah, but it was a fairly forward looking party; Agness Agnes McPhaill was the leader, the first woman in the House of Commons, I believe.

SD: Did they relate at all to the trade union movement in Ontario?

SM: Not really. They were built around farmers interests, though I think the feeling of the group was too that they were working in the interests of lower paid people, but they didn't make any sort of a pitch for the trade union vote that I ever heard.

SD: Was your family involved in the UFO?

SM: Oh, no. (laughs). My father was a rabid conservative.

SD: And what was his reaction to you?

SM: (Laughs). Well you can well imagine. Except that I was away from home working by that time, so it really didn't matter. But he was death on that, absolute death! You would have thought it was the Communist party I was involved in. (Laughs).

SD: Did you grow up on a farm?

SM: Yes I did. I stayed there until I was nearly 13, then I started to work.

SD: You began to work when you were 13?

SM: Not quite, but I was a tall well-grown girl and of course I said I was 16. (Laughs)

SD: Did you work as a domestic?

SM: No, strangely enough. The first job I got was with a doctor. He had a four room office building, and I had charge of that, keeping it clean, and making appointments and things.

SD: A lot of responsibility?

SM: Oh yes. I wouldn't dare to tackle it now, but I was pretty sure I knew the score in those days. I wish I knew as much then as now, as I thought I did then.

SD: How old were you when you first became involved with the UFO? Were you really young?

SM: Well at eight I called myself a UFOer. I don't suppose I knew all of their policy; I think my whole thing was, Conservative I knew I wasn't or a Liberal. I knew what I wasn't; I didn't quite yet know what I was, you know.

SD: How did you meet them? Did you find them through the community or *through other kids?*

SM: We were a very political family, and my father was quite involved in the Conservative party. We just grew up in an atmosphere ^{of} knowing what politics was, and I believe, pardon my information about the UFO by reading, though we did have a UFO neighbor or two, but I can't remember going over the deal much with them; at the age of eight or nine I wouldn't have been taken very seriously if I did.

SD: When you were working at VGH, were you at all involved in the union then?

SM: No, I attended all the union meetings, or at least as many as I could because I worked evening shift. At that time, well, I thought that was for other people, people who were smart, you know, bright women who worked in the unions. You might dream you could but you knew you'd never be smart enough to be elected. Consequently I was never elected or never even nominated, of course with that attitude. Because I do think that people value you the way you value yourself, and at the time I didn't think I was too bright. (Laughs).

SD: So at St. Paul's you did become an organizer?

SM: Oh yes. I was involved in the forming of the union to the extent that I communicated with, certainly all the girls in the laundry. I got two or three of them interested into communicating along with me. There were two of us

SM: (cont) really who took the leading role there. But our group was all we talked to; we were each given areas and our groups, and the fellows that came up with the truck and things, we'd talk to them about the union but we weren't in charge of going into the hospital part and doing it.

SD: How did the union campaign start in St. Paul's? Who started it?

SM: Well, I really think it probably was a grass-roots movement on account of Vancouver General getting more money. I couldn't tell you who really started it. I knew who came to me, is ^{two men called} Bob Standell and Johnny Wigegerber; they were both engineers I think, I'm pretty sure they were. No, Johnny worked on the electrical side though he wasn't an electrician. And they probably were the ones who started, I wouldn't be surprised. The engineers used to belong to our union, I'm sure they did in the beginning. I was trying to think the other day, but I'm pretty sure they did. But later of course they belonged to operating engineers. I think at the beginning they belonged to ours. But I imagine Johnny and Bob were the ones who started it really.

SD: How would they bring together people who were also interested in the union to organize?

SM: Well just call on you on your shift as a rule. I know they would grab Jeanette, Jean and myself and so on, and talk to us at lunch hours, come over hurriedly and give us little bits of paper that were given around

SM: (cont) about the meeting date. And actually we were allowed to use the nurse's auditorium a bit. As I say Sister Gertrude who was the head of personnel, actually she wasn't the personnel manager, a man was that, but she was in charge of that area of administration. And she was in favor of having the union. You see at that time, BCHIS had just taken over, and the hospital was having such a dreadful time with BCHIS, that I'm sure that they wanted the union in to sort of go to bat for them. I'm sure of it.

SD: What was BCHIS?

SM: B.C. Hospital Insurance, you know, the government.

SD: How did Johnny and the other man know that you were sympathetic to unions?

SM: By that time I had worked there a couple of years already, eh, and I think that you just know who you can approach. I, of course, I'll talk "union" anytime, but alot of the other girls wouldn't open their mouth on the problem. So I don't know how we knew but somehow we didn't get many surprises. I think you get to know; after all you sit at a long table together and have lunch, eh? You know something.

SD: Do people talk to each other?

SM: Oh certainly they do. They say their husband is in the union and they hate it or they say their husband is in the union and they love it, or you know, whatever, it's a good thing or something like that. You know.

SD: Had there been any attempts to organize the hospital

SD: (cont) before that?

SM: Yes, there had. And I had heard at one time they had a union in, and evidently it was broken; this was before my time. And when I went there first, the company union was in, so you can just imagine: we got a little modest raise every couple or three years, maybe three cents an hour or something, you know, ridiculous. Just a token.

SD: Why was the company union established, do you know, at all?

SM: I believe the Catholic Church had its heavy hand pretty heavy over the personnel in those days, and I believe that what they said, went.

SD: So did they set it up as another mechanism to control the workforce?

SM: Oh, certainly, certainly. They knew that the union was going to come in eventually. One had been in, I'm convinced of this, though I don't know why. I don't know more of it, if that's so, but I am sure there was originally, the union in St. Paul's. But they knew something was going to be in, so let it be there I'd say. And it was just about as suitable as, you can imagine, I'd didn't even go to the, well after the first one or two, I didn't even go.

SD: Were the officials from it elected or appointed?

SM: Elected. Oh I believe the president was appointed. I'm not convinced of this, but I'm sure he was, and the rest were elected; every attempt was made for a token show of

SM: (cont) democracy.

SD: Were dues deducted to sustain it?

SM: I believe 25¢ a month, well they didn't more, what did they need more for, except to give a picnic once a year.

SD: (Laughs) What was the management's attitude generally towards workers there? Were they very hard on workers

SM: Not really, not really, the odd one was ^{a bit of} a bastard, but, not really.

SD: How did you interest other people in the union once you began to organize? Around what issues?

SM: Money. What can you approach people with, you know, basically it isn't philosophy and it isn't solidarity, it's money for beginning, for beginners, you know. I mean, what else, especially when VGH had just had a whopping ^{good} raise.

SD: Was that a big factor in the unionization, that there was another hospital?

SM: Mhmn, oh yes. Well we're talking about people from every shade in the spectrum, because some of these girls who worked in the laundry; one, for instance, managed an office in Germany with 30 workers under her, but no English, eh, or very little. So, you're not talking about the laboring man altogether. There were practical nurses in the union who were nurses in their own country. So you haven't got a very rabid radical work force, so about all you get those people in with is money.

SD: Were there other issues, like conditions or hours, or seniority?

SM: Yes, hours perhaps, and holiday pay, certainly seniority

oh, seniority was just handled there, worse. It's incredible. You couldn't believe it. A woman might work twenty years in one place but somebody's *niece* or nephew would get out of university and in they'd go. You wouldn't believe.

SD: Were there problems with holidays at all?

SM: Yes. Noone thought they got enough holidays because of course they didn't get as much. We got as much to begin with in a sense, but VGH, the holidays if you worked there five years were longer, if you worked there ten years and so on. Hours always stayed the same.

SD: And were they given out on a seniority basis?

SM: Yes, of course. *once* in seniority could say I want to go between June the 1st and so on. And it continued that way after the union. It's really the only feasible way. But our complaint was, under the old system, that Catholic girls seemed to be able to get off. Like one got off at Christmas every year for three weeks. No-one else could even get two days off at Christmas. She was off at Christmas every year to go back to her folks. No explanation. If you asked why, you were told it just wasn't your business.

SD: What was the attitude of management to the union campaign?

SM: Management in the sense of the sisters, it was all left to Sister Gergrude. The other nuns didn't concern themselves

with it though they probably had their private feelings. But she was the one in charge so it was left to her and her attitude was extremely good. She had a personnel manager Mr. McCabe who was, in the beginning, I don't think I told you before, he was the head of a Borstal type boys detention home, and we were all treated very much like ^{delinquent} little children. If we were good we were still sort of reminded what we were, you know, we were only...

SD: You were always suspect.

SM: Yea, yea. You might at any moment start being wrong, you know. He wasn't too bad an old thing but he was desparately anti-union. I remember when a bunch of us were handing out pamphlets, though I didn't even see the nuns at the other door, he called the police to take away the union fellas who were handing pamphlets out at the south door. But of course, they just ^{went in and} gave up for the time being. They were handing them out to people as they went home they could take one or as they went in they could take one. But one significant theing was that

(side II)

" but didn't I want my job," he knew I was supporting four children, and didn't I want my job and I said I would like the use of a phone to phone the Labour Relations Board to tell them what was being said. And that was the last I heard of that.

SD: Were you a single parent at that time?

SM: Yea. To all intense...I wasn't legally separated. I wasn't divorced but I was, my husband had walked out.

SD: So did that mean you basically had to work?

SM: Oh, yes of course. Oh, sure. Oh, Yes. If I had been fired I don't really know what I would have done. But once in every generation you have to lay it on the line whether it's ^{your} job or not, whether there's ten children. Once in every generation you have to do it. You think it's done, it isn't done, boy. Once in every generation you've got to fight.

SD: When was this campaign was happening. Do you remember about what year?

SM: Yes. 1955 to 1957, in through there.

SD: And can you talk abit about what it was like trying to raise four children and also be active in the union.

SM: (laughter) It wasn't easy, because you know, the union meetings were held as early in the evening as they could manage, they were held at 7:30 I believe for a long time and one could attend a great many of them but I made no pretense of attending them all I couldn't do it. Physically impossible. I got up at five in the morning and I was lucky if I saw my bed before midnight any night. You know, we had a big house.

SD: So you did the house work and...

SM: And we had fruit trees. I had fruit to can.

SD: So you worked very hard.

SM: (Laughter) I certainly did. I certainly did.

SD: Would you have liked to be a full-time organizer?

SM: OH yes, I would have. I became a full-time organizer for the party and I would have loved to for the union.

SD: Were the things that stopped you mostly the responsibilities of...

SM: Oh, of course. Of course. That's a full time job.

SD: Did you use leaflets or did you have meetings and use any other tools to organize?

SM: Actually we had meetings. One of our...Johnny or Bob who were the sparks there, whenever they thought it was necessary until the thing got underway. And we did use leaflets in the sense of notifications of meetings and also leaflets the B.C. Federation of Labour put out on the desirability of unions and so on. This sort of thing.

SD: Did you have a liaison person from the B.C. Fed?

SM: I didn't myself but I know the boys did. I can't say who it was even but I know we did. And the boys got help in organizing even from B.C. Fed.

SD: What kind of help did they give?

SM: Oh, I imagine advise on how to do it, wouldn't you? That was my understanding at the time. I mean how would they know how to do it? I would /but I'm a born organizer, I am. But I don't imagine they would know how to do it without help.

SD: You mean how to talk to people.

SM: Yes. I know there were strange men who came down
and handed out leaflets. I didn't ask where they came
from. You know you take things so nonchalantly while
it's going on and later on it dawns on you, who were
those guys, you know. But I'm sure they were from
B.C. Fed.

SD: Did people go around from various different wards or
different floors.

SM: Oh yes. They had contacts all over the place not only
sometimes one girl on a ward but two or three, you know.
There was quite a ground swell of opinion, largely, as
I say, kind of clustered around this money issue because
we were getting nothing, beans you know, terrible.

SD: So would people be talking union all the time?

SM: Oh, wow, yes. Believe me, you'd buzz and buzz together
and then a boss would come along and we'd all be
working like mad and then the minute he'd get by you'd
start again. Telling the latest information, ^{did} you
hear so and so got into trouble with Mr. McCabe and all
this, you know.

SD: Was it really exciting?

SM: Oh, yes. It was great fun. That's such a dull job you
know. A nothing job that anything is great fun.

SD: And did you go to people's homes at all?

SM: Yes, but not that much because you know, you can just see them all the time. You'd no trouble seeing them. If nothing else you can go over and sit down beside somebody in the main lunch room. I think a hospital's a little different but, you really don't need to do much home visiting I can never remember not being able to find anyone I wanted.

SD: Is that because of the concentration of the workforce?

SM: Oh, yes, yes. And because they have a common lunchroom. Mind you we had a little lunch room in the laundry but there was nothing to stop you going to the cafeteria which we did a lot at that time to talk to people. But we didn't really have to get to talk to people to convert people in the lunchroom. We were just in charge of our own little unit, you see. So it was just to compare notes we'd dash over to the lunch room and see what was doing there.

SD: Were the women in the laundry very pro-union?

SM: Yes. Perhaps more than any other department. They were the girls who really did the hard, hard work, really hard. And I think...what other department was good too, I can't remember which one, but Johnny's said the laundry and this other department were really tops.

SD: What were the hard areas to organize?

SM: Oh, paramedical. The practical nurses were not too easy but when they came in they came in with a bang you know.

But the paramedical type of people. The older people. The older women who were Catholic and had been with the Sisters for years. The closer they were to management the harder they were to organize.

SD: Was that the case in terms of some job areas like...

SM: Well I'm thinking for instance, of the people who cleaned Villa Maria. That's the residence on the penthouse where the Sisters lived. That sort of person. The person who was in charge of the priest's room and clothing and stuff. Those sort of people were impossible. We just learned to let them alone. And the waitresses in the cafeteria they were fine. The secretarial staff were impossible, pretty well, although some of them were good. This type of thing. The lab workers weren't that easy. They were in touch with the doctors quite a bit.

SD: So it was almost like there was an identification with management.

SM: In some cases, yes. Three or four people didn't join the union. They had to pay the dues but they were allowed not to join and eventually they died out or something. But they were no disturbance while they were there.

SD: Did the lab workers come in with you?

SM: Yea. Some of them. You see, the people in the lab who are just doing very menial type of jobs, the paramedics y' in the lab, you know, the actual technicians, no, they came in with us and later on the X-ray technicians left us and

formed a group of their own although I can't tell you which it was. And the lab workers, I believe, some of those did, the technicians there, left us and whether they formed a group or just stayed unorganized I don't know. But a certain level of them were still in the union that I know.

SD: Do you remember the central contract issues in the first contract?

SM: Not really. Just bread and butter issues really. Recognition of the union, holiday pay, better holiday conditions, not only holiday pay and higher wages. The hours, nothing much could ever be done about those you know because the shifts seem to make it necessary. They did change the shifts by half an hour, instead of 6:30 you came on at 7:00 and so on. But that was just about it for the first contract.

SD: Were there problems with shifts in the hospitals?

SM: Always, always. Because, have you ever worked shift work? Yea? Then you know what it is. You never get your sleep. No sooner do you accustom yourself to sleeping at night than you're switched onto nights and you're trying to sleep in the day. And even a day to evening shift is bad. Throws your meals off, throws your sleeping hours off, to say nothing of your social life or family life. Oh, its a rotten situation.

SD: Were people on swing shifts in the hospitals?

SM: Oh, yea. I don't know how else one does it. But I always

thought, a great many of the girls preferred to stay on one shift, and even then ~~their~~ social life was botched up but at least they could sleep and they could eat at the same times and this sort of thing. But they ^{abandoned} ~~gave up~~ this idea totally, oh perhaps ten or eleven years ago and you had to change. You changed from day to evening, or from night to day, you didn't have to change from days to night say, but it was still a rotten deal.

SD: Did you ever experience things like being called and told not to come in or missing pay and that kind of thing?

SM: Before the union, yes. I can remember, I can't remember just what happened, but it must have been some sort of a breakdown in the laundry or perhaps we were all caught up or something, but a bunch of us were phoned and told not to come in. Two or three times. It didn't happen terribly often but enough because we were pretty put off because there was no pay with it.

SD: What were the nuns like as management.

SM: Oh, I don't think you should call them paternalistic, probably maternalistic, and very much momma knows best. One just didn't speak. If you were scolded for anything it did you no good to say but I didn't do this. This isn't my job. You just stood and took what was there. And later on you perhaps went to your own supervisor and said, look I'm being accused of this or not doing this. And perhaps she would take it up with the sister concerned. But they

were very, very strict.

SD: How was the hospital structured, was it like there was a nun over each department?

SM: Oh, yes.

SD: Then lay personnel supervisors?

SM: Yes. ^{though} in surgery, for instance, Sister Scholastica was not only the nun in charge, she was the supervisor too. That could happen. But mostly not.

SD: So it was like there was a dual structure of supervision?

SM: Yes. Oh, it was a beauty I'm telling you. (laughter)

Not a mouse could creep but someone knew about it.

SD: And in terms of the nuns, was there a belief in dedication to your job?

SM: Oh, definitely. Well, you didn't need much wages because after all you were, you know, supposed to take the rest out in dedication of course.

SD: And did that have an affect in particular on Catholic workers?

SM: Oh, yes, not necessarily Catholic workers, but older Catholic workers. The young ones went on pretty much the same as every one else. But it did have an effect on a great many of the older personnel, whether Catholic or Protestant I thought.

SD: Was that because they agreed with the concepts...

SM: Well it was just the general brainwashing that took place from the time some of them went in perhaps at 16 or 17

and they stayed there forever, you know. Because when they went in there were just no jobs to be had, eh? And, the bright ones I tend to feel got out in wartime when there were jobs, but that leaves a level that can't find it in themselves to move, to go on and better themselves, that sort of thing. And they had just about the level of mental competence you can imagine. So that was their life then, eh? And if they went against that, if they ever said that was wrong what did that make of them? It meant that their life was useless, eh? And I think you're going to defend, even if it means pretending to defend some concepts you normally wouldn't, you know.

SD: When you were unionizing, were there any people who held out particularly?

SM: Oh yea. As I said three or four people refused to join and just were told they had to pay their dues and they did. Didn't make any trouble about it as far as I know, apart from a certain amount of loose talk.

SD: Did any people play the role of telling on the workers?

SM: Oh, yes. (laughter) One of the men from old company union did, the President of it. He's dead now so I shouldn't run him down but actually he was just a very pliable man. Later on in union history, we found him to be quite good. In other words, he was now pliable to the union instead of pliable to management, you know. And we found him actually quite good later on.

SD: Do you think there was an inner conflict in people between their union activity and some of this, sort of ^{the} ideas that the nuns put forward around...

SM: Yes, I think there was. Naturally that sort of person didn't go to union meetings. I think they just kept their mouth shut and sort of rationalized their staying there to themselves and that was it. But there were people who wouldn't discuss the union, yet who wouldn't lift a finger to do anything against it, but just you could tell they didn't care about it.

SD: In the hospital were women present at all a t different levels?

SM: Oh, yes.

SD: So women were...

SM: Except women were supervisors but I don't remember a woman as a head administrator, it was ^{always} a man. The Medical Director is always a man. Now this may not be so since I left, I really don't know, but the top posts, the two really top posts were always men. It was

SD: pretty general then I think.

SD: Did it help to have women supervising women, were they more sympathetic to the problems...

SM: Oh, they were a fairly hard old lot, a lot of them. But actually I think probably it was better than to have men. I didn't have anything against them exactly. But you know