

EV: '66 strike. It was a big strike we had.

SD: Can you start with your name, and where you were born.

EV: You want it now? Eva Vaselenek. I was born in, there I go, I freeze up, Hardwick, Vermont.

SD: When did your parents come to Canada?

EV: They came, I don't know the date, they came to Canada and went to Vermont.

SD: And what did your father--

EV: No, wait a minute, yeh, my father and mother, they were born in Canada, around Montreal, Quebec, and then they came to Canada. They went to Vermont, let me get it straight, they went to Vermont from Canada.

SD: And then they moved back again.

EV: No, they stayed in Vermont, they died in Vermont. Now I got it right; that's wrong there for you, I'm sorry.

SD: That's okay. And what did your dad do?

EV: He was a granite cutter. He had his own shed.

SD: Did you marry?

EV: Yes, I'm married. I married in Chicago, in 1926.

SD: What did your husband do?

EV: He was working at The Tribune in Chicago. He worked in there for years, and then, we went down in the Depression then.

SD: Is that why you decided to leave the States?

EV: Yeh, we were supposed to come out here to live with his parents. We were in the Depression at that time.

SD: And did you have any children?

EV: Yes, I had two children in Chicago. The rest of 'em were born during the Depression. So, uh...

SD: When did you come to Vancouver?

EV: In 1943.

SD: And, when you got here, did you move to Steveston, to Richmond?

EV: That's where we went right away. It was hard to get a job, uh to get a place to live, them days. Even though you did get a Japanese house, we got a Japanese house to live in. My husband was here ahead of me, so he found this place.

SD: Did you have farmland around your house?

EV: No.

SD: Gardens?

EV: No.

SD: No?

EV: No.

SD: And what kind of work were you doing around your home? You had children to raise?

EV: I just looked after my children, that's all. Had a little garden, that's all.

SD: So you did all the housework?

EV: Yes.

SD: What prompted you to get a job, to look for work?

EV: I had a little girl that was sick, in order to give her what we could, I got the job at the cannery, so I'd work during the day, and then I'd go up and see her at night, come home. Finally she got over it, came home. And I

EV: (cont) kept her at home for awhile. And on her ninth birthday, she passed away.

SD: How did you find out about jobs in the cannery?

EV: Through my neighbor. She knew I was having trouble trying to get to the hospital; I didn't have the money to go to see my little girl, so that's how I started to work in the cannery, to get money to go there.

SD: Was it hard to find a job in those days?

EV: Yes it was very hard. You couldn't get a job.

SD: And was your husband able to find work?

EV: No, it was hard for him also. And he was a carpenter.

SD: So he had a skilled trade.

EV: That's right.

SD: When you first worked in the cannery, what were the conditions like there? Can you describe it?

EV: Well, seeing how I needed work so bad, I guess I didn't even stop to think the conditions of anything, you know, but I was washing fish, and nobody bothered me or anything. And the lady, I knew her pretty well, that got me the job in there, I was a green-horn about washing fish. And then they used to take you from washing fish, onto packing fish, in the cans. That's all the trouble I had there then, when I first started.

SD: What were the canneries themselves like, physically? Was it cold?

EV: Oh, it was very, very cold. Yes, you had cracks in the floor and everything. In the wintertime, you had to stand in buckets in order to keep warm. Your hands would go

EV: (cont) real cold until they would just give a spring to them you know, heat. And worked like that. year?

SD: Was the work steady, or did you have to wait for the fish to come in?

EV: No, sometimes you'd go and sit around for a whole day, before the boat would come in, then the boat wouldn't come in, they'd make you sit around there, no pay, all day long.

SD: How much did you make? Working there?

EV: I think, if you made 65 dollars a week, you was lucky.

SD: Was the rate hourly, or was it based on how many flats you could fill?

EV: No,
^ this was all hourly work; you was paid 35¢ an hour.

The packers, the packers that put the can, the fish in the cans, they were on piecework, that was piecework, I didn't do any of that, just once in awhile, if they were short. I was lucky to make enough to live on there.

SD: Were men and women in the workplace together?

EV; Yes, the men were putting the fish on the tables, and that.

SD: So what kind of jobs would men do and what kind of jobs would women do in the canneries?

EV: Well, the men would take and put fish on the table. It would come off the boat on an elevator and run down into great big bins, and they used to take the, feed the fish from the bin over to the iron chinks, and then it used to come on the line to the girls. And then, they used to stand, they used to have great big bins on the back of us, after we washed the fish, it would go into those bins, then the men used to take them up to the hand fillers.

SD: Right. And what was it --

EV: And then they used to, men used to work on retorches where you used to put the fish where it would cook, retorch.

SD: And what would women do?

EV: They'd wash the fish. And then they'd pack it, in the cans.

SD: And did the men and the women receive different wages for the work that they did?

EV: The men was different wages than women.

SD: And were they lower or higher?

EV: They weren't too far apart; they weren't too far apart. The women who were working on piecework made twice as much as the men.

SD: And were there different races, or ethnic groups?

EV: There were mostly, well in certain canneries, it'd depend on what cannery ~~it~~ was in. B.C. Packers had mostly Indian women, ~~filling~~ cans, packing.

SD: And how about other ethnic groups; were there Japanese workers?

EV: Not at that time. They came in, the Japanese didn't come until, in [^]when was it? '40, 67? or something like that? or earlier?

SD: And were there Chinese workers as well?

EV: Oh yes, there was Chinese workers.

SD: And what jobs would they work on?

EV: The Chinese, they used to work on those chinks, the iron chinks, and ^{then} they used to stand at the end of the line when the fish used to come down, pick the god fish from the

EV: (cont) bad fish, and put in boxes.

SD: So, were different ethnic groups doing different kinds of jobs within the canneries? And did that mean that there were sort of like pay differences between them?

EV: No, no, ^{it was} all the same pay.

SD: Were there any tensions between the different races in the cannery, like sort of tensions around race?

EV: Just at your BC Packers.

SD: What was that like?

EV: Mostly, like they didn't want to work by this girl; or they didn't want to work by that girl. They didn't like it, that's about all.

SD: Was there hostility towards the Japanese women when they came back?

EV: When they came back, there was, yes. They couldn't stand having the Japanese come in and work by them.

SD: How did people deal with that? Like did you do anything to try and better that situation?

EV: Oh, if I knew about it, I used to say something about it, ^{how else} and tell them that they were just as good as they were, and they worked the same way. They had just as much right to work in there as they did.

SD: Okay. So at that time, there was no equal pay for women?

EV: No.

SD: And, what was the supervision like within the workplace? Was it heavily supervised? Did they have charge hands?

EV: They had a charge hand, yes, she used to come around all

EV: (cont) the time, watch to see how the girls were doing their work and that, and place the girls where they needed certain girls at certain jobs. But they were all the same pay though.

SD: Did people who worked in the plants generally get along fairly well, or was there conflicts between them?

EV: It all depends; it all depends. You get that all over.

SD: The women working in the plants, were most of them single or married?

EV: Both. Single and married.

SD: Were they younger women or older?

EV: They were, I would say they were around their 20's on, except when it was for school; the school kids used to come and work, then they'd be about 18, 19.

SD: And did many of them have children?

EV: Everybody that was working had children.

SD: What did they do about taking care of their kids?

EV: Just left them at home, went to work.

SD: Right.

EV: Unless they had a mother to leave them with or something like that. But, you take at B.C. Packers, they had a place there where they used to look after the children. The people used to come from way up Alert Bay, and they had the bunk houses and that, and they used to bring the children down with them. And then they used to have someone looking after them there.

SD: Did the company pay for that?

EV: Yes, the company paid for that.

SD: Was that after people were unionized?

EV: Before, before. (laughs)

SD: And did you work once you had married? Yeh, you were working after you were married.

EV: Yeh.

SD: Once you began to work, and your child was in the hospital, why did you continue to work, because you needed the money?

EV: Needed the money. My husband wasn't working steady then neither. He was a carpenter, but he used to have to go out of town, and that, ^{meant he'd} be gone for a month or two and that's all. There wasn't enough money to live on.

SD: And how did your husband feel about your working?

EV: He couldn't do much about it, (laughs)

SD: How about your family; did your family pretty well accept women going out to get jobs?

EV: There never was said too much about it around there, because there was a woman also across the street who was doing the same thing, she had to go out to work too. Her husband was a carpenter.

SD: So, the community generally accepted that if women could find jobs, it was alright?

EV: Yes.

SD: And what did you do in terms of child care; did you have a babysitter?

how achieved?

EV: No. I used to send my children out to some friends to look after the kids for me. I had two little girls that were still young, not goin' to school. And I used to send them over to a friend of mine to look after, and they used to pay her, so much.

SD: And when would you do your housework?

EV: After I come home from work.

SD: So you would work all day, and do your housework, and take care of these kids at night?

EV: Mmmn. And those days they didn't have the things to work with that they do today. We used to ^{have to} scrub on a scrub-board and boil your clothes and that. You'd be 12 o'clock before you went to bed. And then you'd have to get up six o'clock the next morning and go to work.

SD: So were you tired alot?

EV: I was tired, but I kept on goin'.

SD: Did most of your friends work in the fish industry?

EV: Oh yes, oh yes. They all worked in the fishing industry, after they came out there, then when you got acquainted with the people that were in there, knew all the people in the community, like.

SD: What job did you have when you first became active ^{with} in the trade union movement?

EV: What did I have?

SD: Yeh, What work were you doing? And how did you become active within the union?

EV: I was workin' in the cannery. I was their charge hand for

EV: (cont) about six months until the people got after me and wanted me to start the union going. And I was trying to get them to go ahead and do it 'cause they had more education than I did, you see, they were, no you couldn't get ^{'em} going, so everytime, every morning I'd come in, "Eva, what are we going to do today; you gonna have the union in today?" I says, "It all depends; I don't know," "what's the matter with you?" "Well, we can't do it!" "Why?" "I got too much to do," I says, "I got children to look after too." So, finally, I got in then, started, talked to the girls, told them that if they wanted me to start a union, they'd have to do what I'd tell them to do. They says, "Fine." I says, "Well, I'll go call up the business agent, see if he'll come down and organize us." And I got all the girls together, finally I went out, after the work was all done we went and got on the fishermens wharf, and organized. Homer Stevens and Al(lie?) Gordon came down. We elected our shop stewards; next day we come in with our buttons on and forelady says to the foreman, "Look, look, those girls got into the union last night." He says, "Yeah, and what are you going to do about it!"

SD: *So that was it?* People looked to you to organize; why was that? Was it because you had been pretty vocal about conditions within the canneries?

EV: Oh, I used to holler about the conditions that were in there; I used to holler about the way they used to have fish and then the forelady'd come round, holler at 'em

EV: (cont) the way she did instead of the way she did instead of talkin' human to 'em. I wouldn't take it. You used to have to keep up ^{a certain} space, in washing fish; she used to be behind you, if you can't do that, well she'd go and put off someplace else, you can't do that, she'd put you someplace else, then out you go. She wouldn't keep you.

SD: So were there issues ^{around} hiring and firing that the union took up immediately? Are there any examples of that?

EV: Oh, yeah. I have them but I haven't got 'em now.

SD: How about, you'd given an example of a woman who's fired without just cause?

EV: We had ^{had} a meeting in the lunch room and this girl spoke up and I got up and she says, "Yeah I've got a beef": she says, "What can you do when they start pushing you around?" So after that, the forelady got after her and asked her why she brought that up after the meeting. And she says, "Who, who's been kicking you around?" She says, "You." She says, "Why?" She says, "Well," she says, "you said that I took and cheated on my boxes, for my punches." And she says, "Somebody, and I think it was you, that put the fish there on that board, an extra fish, for me to get an extra punch." She says, "I didn't do it." So finally we went to management about it. The management, I had the shop stewards up ^{and all} there ^{trying} to discuss this. And Les Ashton says to me, "You know Eva, this isn't the first time this has happened." I says, "It is this time"; I says,

EV: (cont) "This is unjust." And he asked each one of them what they thought about it, except that one that I told you, that was kicked out of the union. She stuck with the company with that. She says, "Well if people ^{are} going to cheat like that, I'm not staying here to talk about it." He says, "Okay, everybody can go, except you Eva, you're going to stay here until you see things my way." And we were getting paid by the hour, so I lost about three or four hours, pay that day.

SD: So stewards wouldn't be paid when they were on union duty?

EV: No, I was getting--

SD:

EV: No, no they weren't paid. They were after awhile. After. Oh it was about the following year that we fought for that, that they should get paid if they go on, you know meet with the company with beefs and stuff like that. They shouldn't have to, ~~lose their~~ pay. So ~~they used~~ to pay us.

SD: So, how was, was it resolved?

EV: No it wasn't resolved. She was kicked out, couldn't do anything about it.

SD: And were there people there who were trying to undermine the union, like this one woman you mentioned?

ED: That was the only one. That was the only one.

SD: What kind of things ~~would~~ she do?

ED: ~~You'd be doing~~, something around there and she'd come say it wasn't right and this and that, and then the

- ED: (cont) company would come and tell you^{to} go to work.
- SD: This meeting that you mentioned, did the workers meet with management regularly to talk about production?
- EV: Oh yes. Oh yes. You'd go meet with the company once a month. We had our regular meeting once a month with the company. We'd be about 10 shop stewards, that would meet.
- SD: And you at that time present grievances.
- EV: Yeah, we had papers and everything. And the next time they'd have^{it} on paper so that we could hang it up in the cannery and show the membership what we had gone through.
- SD: You began to work during the War, were there any changes during the period of the Second World War in terms of working conditions; or any effect of the war on your job in unionization? No?
- EV: No.
- SD: How long did it take to get the union in completely?
- EV: It took, I started in '44 to get the union in there, and I got it in there in '46.
- SD: And by then it was in --
- EV: It was in pretty tight, pretty tight then.
- SD: And you found out about^{trade} unions mostly through the women on your shop floor who pushed you?
- EV: Yeah.
- SD: How about your husband? Was he at all?
- EV: Well he was talking about it. They went to see him about me organizing and that, that they'd give me a job like.

EV: (cont) It was okay with him. He thought it would be a good experience for me.

SD: And he'd been sympathetic to the Fishermens Union before?

EV: Mnmn.

SD: Right. So...

EV: When the union started, I should tell you this: When I started with the union we had to have a great big regular meeting to elect our shop stewards and also our executive board, and we did, and we happened to get people from each one of the plants to represent the union, from each one of these plants. And you tried to get somebody on the board there and you just couldn't do it; we had to draw up our by-laws, so we were trying to get a committee to do that. So finally there was a little fellow that was in there, and he says to me, "Are you going to vote for yourself? If you don't," he says, "we're out." I says, "No, I'm not going to vote for myself," I says, "I'll vote for you." He says, "Okay, you vote for me then; we'll see what we can do." Finally he went and voted for me and I got in, so I couldn'g get out of it.

SD: So you were then on the executive--

EV: I was on the executive board. We had the meeting at my house.

SD: Was the *community you lived in*, Stevetson, generally pretty pro-union?

EV: No. They didn't, they were mixed up like, you know, some of them figured you're doing the wrong thing by having the

*Why
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consulted?*

EV: (cont) union here, and others, you know it all depends, who was in there. You had alot of these Ukrainian people as well. They used to push, ^{they're} quite Labour people, they used to push to the union in there as well. And the fishermen, you had quite a few of the fishermens there, that belonged, right in Stevetson; they wouldn't even listen, they wouldn't even think of a union; and finally they kept having meetings there and everything; finally we got all the boys in.

I went, you couldn't even get them at the meeting. Even Homer says to me, he says, "I don't know," He says, "you've certainly started something"; he says, "those guys are going to the meetings all the time," he says, "You'll get a full hall, just like that." I says, "Because I go to the meetings; I go up along the wharf and I tell the boys that there's a meeting, and that they should be down at the meetings."

SD: So you'd pull them out to them?

EV: I'd pull them out to the meetings.

SD: Was the issue of the union ^{and the fact} that it was being organized, something that people talked about alot in the community and debated or mostly at work?

EV: It was mostly at work. Then the fishermen used to talk alot about it. But the shoreworkers, I think what started ~~it~~ would be the fishermen's wives, where the fishermen was in the union, that's where in the union. Because if their husband was in a union, they wanted also a union in the plant right? I think that's how it started off.

SD: Did, once you became active with a union, did management's attitude towards you change at all.

EV: Didn't have no use for me. Did everything they could even the s--, even the foremen^s and charge hands used to do things and watch. I used to have to watch my step, every little step I made, I didn't dare to talk to my neighbor^{next door} too much, while we were working. If I did, right away they'd figure I was talking union, and that was it.

SD: So they kindof tried to get rid of you?

EV: Yup. They couldn't. Then on top of that, they tried to say I wasn't doing my work. Then Tommy Parkins came in and tried to back them up on it, because there was a guy that came in, to try to teach these girls how to fillet soles; and the first thing he did, he came to me^{on} the soles, and he wanted me, to see how I was filleting soles, and he says, "You're okay, you're doing a wonderful job, keep it up!" But they were trying to say that I wasn't doing my job, so they made Ken Fraser back up on that.

SD: And Ken Fraser was the head of the---

EV: Canneries.

SD: Had you been a member of any other union before?

EV: No.

SD: So this was your first experience.

EV: Yup.

SD: And you were active in organizing. What kind of work would you do as an organizer? How would you talk people into joining the union?

EV: Well I'd ask them first if they belonged to the union. And they says, "Why?" I says, "Well I'm here," I says, "to see what I can do for you," I says, "if you want to join I'll sign you up." And he says, "Well we're not interested." And I says, "Why?" "Because it's a Communist union." I says, "What?" He says, "It's a Comunist union." I says, "Well, what if it is;" I says. I says, "Who, who do you say that's a Communist?" "Homer." I says, "Well, he doing a damn good job then, isn't he!" I says, "After all," I says, "we're all people working," and I says, "after all, look at the money that you're getting for your fish and everything." I said, "Did you get that through the company or did you get that through the union?" "Well, *sure the* union fought for it!" I said, "Yes," I says, "therefore you're riding on the other guy's back; why in heck don't you get in there with the rest of them?" I says, "I'm Secretary here for the Fishermens Credit, *for the* Fishermens Union, and I've been looking at the books, and I'm trying to sign the people that've kindof gone back on their dues." Oh, he got in there with me. And that's how I started signing up all the different men in there. Sometimes some of them would run away, *(they'd see me)* they'd *coming* run away. Then finally they'd come to me after.

SD: Did you become a *paid organizer?*

EV: Yes.

SD: So what would your work be, as a Payor's Master? What would you do?

EV: Just signing up the members. Going down and reporting what I've done and that.

SD: So, did you ever go onto the boats?

EV: Oh, yes. I was jumping up on the big boats and everything, seeing that they were cleared, everybody was in the union.

SD: Did you ever have any problems on the boats?

EV: Sometimes you'd get a problem with the men; they'd get kind of huffy with you. Then they'd finally sign up, because they knew that they couldn't leave, unless if they were cleared.

SD: Right. So they were pretty well, it was like a closed shop or something like that?

EV: Yeah.

SD: Did they ever threaten you or anything like that?

EV: I had some of the fishermen that threatened me to get off the boat; they took a hammer at me. This guy, I don't think he's in the union today, that did that.

SD: So there were people who were like really resistant to you?

EV: Yeh, that's right.

SD: And, in terms of organizing the canneries, what would you do there? Would you go around in^{to} the canneries and talk to the women there?

EV: During my lunch hour. Many a days I went without lunch, just signing up members, in the union.

SD: When you were a paid organizer, would you go from cannery to cannery?

EV: Yup. That's the only way you could organize them.

SD: Did you ever have any problems being able to talk to people there?

EV: No, not too much, no.

SD: Management wouldn't interfere to that?

EV: As long as I wasn't interfering with the people that were working, that was fine. In fact the union fought for me to get in there, into the cannery to sign up members, as an organizer.

SD: When you began to organize in your first plant, did you set up any kind of organizing committee, ~~or~~ try and do that? Or did you mostly do it yourself?

EV: I did it myself.

SD: What kind of skills did you need to organize?

EV: I don't think you needed any; I didn't even have the education to do it; I just did what I thought was right.

SD: Except that you needed a certain amount of guts to be able to...

EV: That's about all.

SD: Did you ever organize men who were cannery workers?

EV: Oh yes. I organized all these men that were working in the cannery. No trouble. I used to go in and organize the Chinese guys too, some of them wouldn't want to join, then finally the other guy would talk to them in Chinese, and finally he'd sign with me.

SD: So would you go into the bunkhouses?

EV: I'd go into the bunkhouse, . That was fun.
(laughs)

SD: Did management ever react to you doing that?

EV: They did towards the last, he did towards the last, because the bunkhouse was right next ^{door} to the office and I went in there, the guys told me to come in there, ^{that} two or three of the guys wanted to join, then I went in there. *Ken* Fraser came after me about it, I told him to go to hell. Then he called me into his office, wanted to know why I did it.

SD: Did you ever have newsletters or leaflets, or public meetings to help you organize?

EV: Oh yes, we used to get them, yes.

SD: So would those be regularly?

EV: Yeah, once a month we'd get those, once a month. And after meetings and everything like that we had letters, to know what went on in the meetings and all that, and it used to go around to the plant, we used to hang them in the plants, to let them know just what we were doing.

SD: And did you think that was important, to have a real [/]system of communication, going out to the people?

EV: [/]do, I do, [/]do.

SD: Did that help them feel involved in the union?

EV: Yes, yes, and it was also like the fishermen, as soon as we got them shop stewards in there, on the boats, for each plant, that meant an awful lot, ^{be} cause all I had to do was just go in and see the shop steward and tell him that there was a meeting arranged, that it was going on, I'd go and tell him, and he'd go and tell his gang, that he's around. He'd tell them, and they'd all be down at the meeting without any

EV: (cont) trouble.

SD: So were people very active in the union?

EV: Some of them were, 'cause it's a big union. Your Japanese people, I never had too much trouble with organizing them at all, they were very good in signing up. why?

SD: What plants did you work in? You mentioned working in Canada fish at some time.

EV: I worked at the Canadian Fish, that was when I first started to work, in 1943. In 1944 I went to the Canadian Fish, and I worked there for four or five months, and they were closing down, and then I went to the Canadian Fish doing some herring, and on the line these people were being paid by the hour, not by the hour, piecework. And I went in there to work, but you couldn't get no fish to work with, so I just quit, went back to Imperial the next day.

SD: Was that because the competition was so heavy?

EV: That's right.

SD: And is that a result of piecework?

EV: Yes.

SD: What other kind of things would be a problem around organizing? Would you need people to help you with language, or translations?

EV: Well when I got into a tight spot, where people didn't understand, or I didn't understand them, I'd get somebody that could talk their language, to talk to me, or talk to them.

SD: Were there any groups that were particularly opposed to unionization?

Eva Vaselenek

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EV: Well, you had your Mennonites, you had your Jehovahses, and
then whats the other one? Mennonites, Jehovahs, and the--

SD: Hindus?

EV: Hindus at first.

SD: So was that on religious grounds, or

END OF SIDE 1

Side II

EV: ...Mennonites. I had one girl, she used to come over and see me quite often, and she used to tell me that so-and-so will get into the union and that. Then I'd go and ^{I'd} sign them up.

SD: So, the Mennonite community itself or people that were supportive of unions, kind of convinced each other that they should join in?

EV: Right, right.

SD: And were there many Native people who were involved in the union?

EV: They weren't at first until their organization went, there was no more organization as far as your Indian people. The Native Brotherhood, I don't know what happened there, but there was no more Native Brotherhood, so then I heard that among the girls that were working, so I figure I'm going to see what I can do, organizing them. And, I went and spoke to one that was a great friend of ours, Mrs. Essue, and she says, "well," she says, "we ^gve got no organization," and I says, "Do you want to join?" "Oh yes, I'll join," she says, ^{you} go and ask the rest of them, they'll join." So as soon as the Business Agent, Williams, is that his name?, heard about it, then he came after me, raised hell, ~~for~~ signing up his people into the union. So I told him, I says, "Your organization is not a union, your organization is more of a, ... what is it now?...What do you call it?"

SD: Well, sort of a...

EV: It's not a union, it's a, an organization anyway. You be-

EV: (cont) long to, like with me I belong to a certain thing
in the Catholic Church, ^{And I said,} that's what it is!" He says, "We're
in the union." And I says, "You're not in the union until
you belong to it." I said, "You haven't signed into the
union"; I says, "you're a business agent." "Well," he says,
"that's a union." I says, "No it isn't." I says, "It's an
organization like a Catholic organization or anything of
the kind." So after that he left me alone. Guy Williams,
he was a business agent of?

SD: Brotherhood.

EV: Brotherhood.

SD: Right. Did this sort of conflict between Brotherhood and
the fishermens union create confusion amongst the people?

EV: No, no, no. They belonged to it, his wife was one of the
first ones that joined the fishermens union.

SD: Was there any discussion within the fishermens union at all
about the conditions that Native people face generally?

EV: No, no.

SD: If the union was in a strike stituation, did it publish
strike bulletins?

EV: Oh yes. Everyday there was something going around, bulletins
and everything. And even what was going on, we'd call meet-
ings. We'd have meetings, quite a few meetings.

SD: How did you get the position of paid organizer? Did people
elect you to that? And how did that process happen?

EV: I was elected through the fishermens union, I was elected
through the fishermens union, to be the organizer.

SD: And did you have the respect of the people on the shop floor?

EV: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. They all respected me very highly.

SD: How did the employers react to the organizing drive, when it began within the canneries? Did they harrass, they harrassed you, did they harrass other people in the union, did they try and blacklist people?

EV: Well you'd have to watch yourself on the job. They were very strict there. They watched every move they could just to put you on the job, so they could fire you and that, in case you did anything. Your foreman, your charge hand, all you had to do was say something on the job and you was off. You had to watch that.

SD: So the union people had to be really careful.

EV: Yeah, I had to jump from the cannery to the fresh fish, to organize the people. And they were watching every move I make. I had to watch, I used to sneak around and outside and then go in through the other part and organize so-and-so when I knew he wanted to sign up.

SD: When you were an organizer, how did you arrange that in terms of work, ^{so} that you didn't lose your job?

EV: Oh, when I went for a paid organizer, the business agent [→]went to speak to the company and told them that I was going to work for the union. And I was going to be a chief shop steward, and I'd have to go to the plant and sign up the people. He says, "That's the only way we'll get our people organized." And he says, "We'd like to have you take a

EV: (cont) leave of absence." He says, "How long?" He says, "Well, it all depends on how long she'll be on the job." So fine and dandy. Then I was on that for about four or five years, when they forgot to put my name in, as a leave absence, I lost 10 years seniority there. So I went back to the plant.

SD: So you had to ^{go} back without seniority?

EV: No I had, you see I had quite a bit of seniority, they just took 10 years off from me. I had to go down the line and then work myself up.

SD: Was one of the reasons that the employers would~~not~~ victimize people who were pro-union, that, was one of the reasons that there were shop stewards on the plant floor, who could...?

EV: If things went wrong, you had a shop steward on every job, so in case something would happen the shop steward would know just what was happening, and then she'd take it up right away.

SD: So how long did you organize for?

EV: Nine years, or more.

SD: You said that in 1948, you stopped working in the plants, no?

EV: '48, no. That's when I, '68.

SD: Oh.

EV: Yeah, '68

SD: And that was because, why did you...?

EV: I wasn't well; I had to quit work. I was on the Board and

EV: (cont) everything, I had to quit, couldn't go anymore.

SD: Was that in part because of the conditions you'd been working in?

EV: Yeah, got arthritis from it.

SD: That happened to alot of women who were working in the plants?

EV: Oh yeah, oh yes.

SD: So it was like an occupational disease almost.

EV: That's right. That's what the doctor called it. But you take, I didn't tell you about the filleting business on there, ^{the} girls work all day long on filleting, you know what filleting is? You got a great big fish in front of you, you got a knife, and you gotta take that knife and just go right down that bone, and you got a nice big fillet. You've probably seen them. And you do that all day long with dull knives and everything, we had to fight to get sharp knives to do that. You'll see that everybody that's worked in the cannery, they'll have their arm that's gone, they can hardly move it; I was for about two years I could hardly comb my hair, from that, cause my arm was gone. Then you take a leave of absence for that too.

SD: What's the solution to that, do people talk about mechanization at all on any of those jobs?

EV: No. They just used to give you time off with that, and go to the doctor's and see what you could do.

SD: Were there any things ^{that you felt} in particular should be done for people who'd been crippled?

EV: I figured we should have a sanitarium of some kind, in case the people got crippled, so they could have a place to go to, those that didn't have homes or something you know, to help them out, but I never could get it through.

SD: Did the union fight for that at all?

EV: We discussed that mostly among ourselves, like Alec Gordon, Tom Parkins, and I; we discussed it and they said we'd have a hard time getting that through. But I think it's a thing that really should be done in one of the plants, 'cause the people work hard in really ice water and everything. And you come home and you're really cold, you can't warm^{up} or anything, the cold is right through you. Three pairs of pants, three pairs of stockings, and then you got^{two or} three sweaters on top of you, you're bound to come out of there with arthritis.

SD: Do people still work in those conditions?

EV: Oh yes. Not quite as bad. We fought to have heat put in the places, so they have heat in the corner, so they come down on you. So it's not as bad as it used to be.

SD: Was that because in part the canneries were out over the waters?

EV: Right. And then you have great big doors that are opened, when they bring the fish in, you have these great big doors and the tubs, and the jeeps ~~are~~ coming in all the time back and forth and that, waves from the water just comes in there and hits you. In the wintertime we used to get them to put plastic sheets down, to keep the wind from

EV: (cont) hitting us.

SD: What other issues were important contract issues? What were the conditions around breaks, lunchroom, hours of work, piecework and so on?

EV: We had a 15 minutes break, we could go and have a cup of coffee and have something to eat, but you had to be back on work. By the time that I got there, about the last year that I was there, they got these machines in there where you had to pay for your coffee and sandwiches if you wanted them. Before that we didn't have that, because we didn't get no cookies towards the last, because the company took them away from the girls, because the girls used to cart them home.

SD: How about...You continued to work after your husband had...

EV: After my husband passed away?

SD: Right.

EV: Oh yeah, I had to pay bills and everything. I was lucky that I belonged to the Credit Union, that's another thing that I helped to organize, was the Credit Union.

SD: How did you start that? Was that through the fishermens' union, that that was begun?

EV: No. Through the Credit Union. We used to have meetings down at my house and that. It was me with that girl that used to come down, she was from the Credit Union. In Steveston I started the one out there; the guy came down and organized the people, I got the people down to the meetings at my place, he organized one in Steveston, the Credit Union, so we got the Fisherman's Credit Union there now, we

EV: (cont) got the Fishermens Credit Union in there now too, in Steveston.

SD: And the end of the war, were women laid off at all in the fishing industry, and did men who were returned soldiers come back in?

EV: No, Didn't affect there at all.

SD: And were you ever a member of a Womens Auxiliary?

EV: I started it in Steveston, the Ladies Auxiliary.

SD: How did you begin?

EV: I don't know. It just came to me, to start going, got the people there and everything. And we organized our president and stuff like that.

SD: Did you go out to the fishermen and tell them to tell their wives to come?

EV: After we were organized, we told them to get their wives out.

SD: And did that work?

EV: Yes, it worked very nicely.

SD: What kind of activities did the Auxiliary...?

EV: They put out, we put on socials, dances. Then when the fishermen would go away, they'd have nice great big dinners for them to go away.

SD: Did the women do any work like in strike situations in terms of support?

EV: They were there helping, bring the food around the people and that, the Ladies Auxiliary.

SD: Would they build any kind of meetings for public support?

EV: No.

SD: Were you involved in any strikes?

EV: Oh, how many[?] (laughs).

SD: Can you talk a bit about some of them?

EV: Oh some of them. There was the first strike that went on out there, you couldn't get the people going; the woman that was the head of that, ^{she stood there;} she couldn't do a darn thing with the people, they were all standing around in front of a company. "Mrs. Kewan," ^I said, ^{let's get going,} "you can't stand here. Just go watch them get places, where you got to go!" So they started marching up and down the street with their little plaques and that, so after that it started ~~going~~ okay.

SD: What year was that do you remember? 1940's?

EV: That was in 1960-something. That was when Adeline took over I forget what year that would be.

SD: Let me just....

END OF SIDE II

EV: Oh, the company didn't want that strike.

SD: Were there strikes earlier on at all, in the '40's or '50's?

EV: No. No, not till you got fully organized, you know. Then you had to know just when to have those strikes, when the fish were coming in.

SD: Especially in a seasonal industry.

EV: Well when they had a strike they always used to have food for the people, used to have certain ones in the family used to get so many fish. Fishermens used to go out and catch it for them, it was very nice.

SD: Would you work with the fishermen, in a strike situation? Like there'd be times when they'd be on strike, would you need to honor their picket lines?

EV: Oh yeh, we'd both be on strike at the same time, the fishermen and shoreworkers.

SD: So would you co-ordinate?

EV: Yeah, oh yes.

SD: How would negotiations happen in a situation like that, cause they were separate union locals?

EV: Your fishermen would negotiate with the company themselves, then we'd go and negotiate ourselves.

SD: Would you have like a mutual agreement that you'd hold out?

EV: Yes.

SD: Before you struck in the 1960's did you have any on-the-job actions that people would do, like slow-downs, or anything like that, ^{to} protest conditions?

EV:

SD: When you were organizing did you feel you got support from the leadership of the union.

EV: Oh yes, oh yes, 100%.

SD: Would you ever go out with people like Tom Parkin or Alec Gordon?[?] ?

EV: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We were always together.

SD: So you'd work as a team.

EV: Yeah, that's right. And Homer Stevens.

SD: What kind of attitudes did people have toward striking?

EV: Some of them would go for it, others would say it was the wrong thing, for fear they'd be afraid they'd be out of a job or something. But once a strike they knew they had to follow.

SD: *Was there any shortage of labour*
Labour, in terms of having enough people to do work in the fishing industry?

EV: That would be just ~~before~~ my time. I was in there just about to the end of that, and I think I heard in the past that they tried to get the union in there then. And they just couldn't do it; they went to management to ask for a higher rate of pay, and I think they got it. And then they didn't bother anymore about the union, so that's when they got after me to get the union in there.

SD: So why did people then go for the union after the war?

EV: On account of wages. They couldn't make ends meet, with the low wages they were getting, they couldn't make ends meet.

SD: And did the union have regular local meetings?

EV: Yes, once a month we had meetings, every month.

SD: What was the stewards structure like? What would the stewards do; would there be one in every plant, or several in every plant?

EV: Oh, yeah, there'd be some in every plant. Then you had the shop steward on every job, and as soon as there was a meeting going on, they'd scatter the word around as well that they'd better be at that meeting.

SD: Did they collect dues?

EV: Yes.

SD: So there was no check off?

EV: Towards the last they didn't; towards the last it was a check-off. We fought for that one because it was too hard for people to pay their dues, they didn't have the money on them or something, they'd just pay by cheque. So half of them wouldn't pay their dues, because they didn't have a chance to see the shop steward or something like that.

They always had an excuse, *you know, you know it*

SD: How were the union officials chosen? Were they elected?

EV: They were elected, everyone of them.

SD: How would you put together a contract? Would it *be shop-floor* meetings?

EV: No that would be executive board, Alec Gordon, Homer Stevens and Parkins. They'd get things fixed up there. Before they did they'd call a meeting of all the membership, to find out what they wanted and that, what they should be negotiating for.

SD: Right. And did people try and establish a uniform contract in the canneries across the province? ^{was} That one of the goals, to create uniform conditions and wages.

EV: Oh yeah, to have it all the same wages, yeah.

SD: So what would that mean in terms of negotiations with employers, cause weren't there different employers or was there a council? Was B.C. Packers the major?

EV: No, no they were all the same. Now when you go ahead and want to negotiate on wages, you have one ^{from} every plant. They call a meeting, people from every plant to meet at this one meeting, to bring up certain problems, what they want, what their wages are. From way from Nanaimo, Prince Rupert and everything, they used to come to Vancouver.

SD: And then the union leadership would take that into negotiations with each different employer.

EV: Yes, ~~they~~ had one, ~~they~~ were represented there.

SD: Were there any political organizations that played an important role within the Fishermens Union?

EV: Not that I know of.

SD: Were there women who were active in the union? Any women who were active in the union?

EV: Yes, there was quite a few of them, quite a few, from all different plants.

SD: And were the women who were active, younger women or older women?

EV: In between. Yeah, there was some young ones and some older ones.

SD: How about marital status, were they married or single?

EV: Married, most all of them were married.

SD: Were their husbands in the industry?

EV: Yes, in the fishing industry. I don't think we had any more than one or two that weren't married. That's all, one or two, the rest of them were all married.

SD: Would it be hard for women who were married to be active in the union in terms of other work that they would need to do?

EV: I don't think so, I don't see why. Cause the way I worked, heavens! if I could do it I don't see why somebody else couldn't do it.

SD: Did most of these women have support from their husbands then, in terms of the union work that they did?

EV: *I couldn't say.*

SD: You had mentioned before that it was hard sometimes to get the women active. Why?

EV: They had to go home and do their gardens.

SD: So household chores were a problem that women faced in terms of *union activity*.

EV: That's right.

SD: Were there that the union did in particular to try and draw in women ⁱⁿ to be ^{ing} more active within the union?

EV: No, that was up to them. They never forced anybody to do.

SD: Were *there* women in the leadership of the different union locals of cannery workers?

EV: Of the different . . . ?

SD: Would women be in the leadership of the different cannery...

EV: Food workers and that?

SD: Yeah.

EV: No, it was just the fishermens and the shoreworkers.

SD: That's where you saw women?

EV: Mhmn.

SD: Right. Did the union have any kind of special newsletter or columns about women's activities, for example, would it feature activities that the Auxiliary was organizing?

EV: They'd put in their letters, yes. They'd come to the, they'd hang them up in the cannery.

SD: Were there any specific issues which came up which were a particular concern, such as maternity leave?

EV: We fought for that, I don't know just how exactly that went, I forget. But I know that they gave these women that were pregnant a certain leave of absence, whether it was a year or two, while they were pregnant and they had to have so long to be with their child, while it was, ^{hill it got to be} itself. So it could ^{get} along.

SD: And the union fought for that?

EV: ~~The~~ union fought for that, yeah.

SD: And was that established?

EV: Oh yes, that was established.

SD: How about equal pay? What kind of work was done around establishing equal pay for women?

EV: The union fought for that too, because the men used to do women's work and get paid the regular wages, and the women

EV: (cont) would be out of a job while the men was doing their work, cause the same way like we were filleting halibut and the women had the great big halibuts while the men were doing the little small halibuts for the same pay that they were getting and we were getting our regular pay, lower pay than they were, so we went at that and now they watch that. Then they used to put the women on the iron chinks for the same pay they were getting in the cannery; they weren't getting the same wages as the iron chinks, so finally they fought that and so, if a woman goes on a iron chink today she gets the regular pay^{as} an iron chinks.

SD: Were there any problems like with wupervisors at all? Did they used to get out of hand at all?

EV: The supervisors used to get after the women, yes. They would come and 'raise Cain' with them over nothing at all.

SD: And...

EV: They used to come over there and push you and push you and push you, "You're not doing good enough!"

SD: What about the issues of the union hiring halls? Did you ever try and push for that?

EV: We did, but never got through with that.

SD: Why did people...

EV: It was kind of hard, in our industry, it would have been very hard to do that, unless if they went just according to the seniority list and that was mighty hard, to do too.

SD: What kind of fight went on to establish seniority, within

SD: (cont) the industry? The union pushed for seniority lists.
How did you do that?

EV: We just got the shop steward and we'd meet with management and everything. And I think they were kind of hostile in a way because the shop stewards were down there all the time about people not being brought into work the way they should. So the first seniority list came in through the fresh fish. And then finally it worked into the cannery. There was quite a fuss about that.

SD: So the principle that was established was that people would be hired back on the...

EV: Seniority list.

SD: Right.

EV: Yuh, and for awhile there they had a cannery list and a seniority list, well, that didn't work, cause they used to take the people from the cannery and they didn't go by seniority and put them into the fresh fish seniority, and there was a big holler about that, so finally they ^{took} just and put the whole thing right down, and then wherever the girls went to work, wherever their job was, it was written ^{down} that this girl did this kind of job, that that girl did that kind of job. So when it came to seniority, they'd go and pick out the girl, if the top one was out, they'd go and pick out the next one, if she did the same job as that other girl, and put her on that job.

SD: Was there ever any discussion ever of women wanting to go on the fishing boats?

EV: No.

SD: What kind of other things did the union do in terms of social activities?

EV: They used to have dances, but they had to quit it, on account of the roughness going on, couldn't take it up any longer. And, as I say, they put on those dinners on, for the boys before they went out to fish. It was kinda hard to have any activities of any kind out there, for the people, the way they were working. Sometimes, you'd go and work, you'd be working at 12 o'clock at night, sometimes they'd be having two shift on.

SD: So your shift could be changed around anytime?

EV: It could. You'd have to watch that too very closely.

SD: Would that make it very difficult for women with kids?

EV: Oh yeh. I think that another thing that made it kinda hard for the company too because they'd have to pay us double time, time-and-a-half after a certain hour, so they'd watch that; that's why they put ^{an} extra line on at night, so they wouldn't have to pay the extra pay; I think it was 10¢ higher for at night.

SD: Did the union provide baby-sitting for any activities?

EV: No.

SD: Can you name any women who were particularly active in the union when you were?

EV: I could, I got a list of them someplace. I could name Frieda Erickson, and Mrs. Treavell, and Polly Paulson, Mrs. Udi, Ellen Zesko, and what is her name? Martin, Jesse Martin.

SD: And were these women all plant chairwomen or shop stewards?

EV: They were shop stewards.

SD: Were the central contract demands around wage issues?

EV: Mhmn.

SD: And conditions of work?

EV: That's right; that's what it was.

SD: Yeh. And did the union any discussions on the question of equal pay when that came up?

EV: Oh yes. It came first, it came up in the convention, and that's where it started in the convention, cause the people were asking for it, and those ^{were} the people that were at the convention.

SD: So there was like a discussion of it?

EV: That's right.

SD: What kind of arguments did people make, do you remember at all?

EV: Oh no I don't. Helen was one of them. (Should ^{whispered.} talk to you about that.)

SD: What was the attitude of men in the union to women who were active? Did they support that activity?

EV: Oh yes. They were very active themselves, the men are.

SD: How about the issue of equal pay and maternity leave; did the men support those demands?

EV: They supported that too.

SD: And those were integrated into contracts?

EV: Mhmn.

SD: And struggled for it. Okay. Okay. That's all I've

SD: (cont) got in terms of questions.

EV: That's good. (laughing).

EV: I worked at the cannery. I quit working in the fishing industry. Those days they used to find jobs for you, if you did that work and you was doing a good job, they used to send you out to another job. That was working in the stocking factory. And those days, they didn't have a union either. You know how ^{you} used to let negotiate? They'd lock the manager inside the plant, and get him in a corner, and negotiate with him to get higher wages.

SD: So when was that, was that in the '30's or '20's?

EV: Oh heavens no! That was way long before that; that was in 1913, 1914.

SD: Right.

EV: Yuh. Then I worked there until they sent me to Bennington, Vermont. I worked there for awhile, and they paid my way out there and they paid my room and board until I was able to make enough to pay for my room and board. So I stayed there, what for about two or three years, then I went into the men's garments; I was making garments for the men. They didn't have no union there either; we wanted bigger wages. We locked the guy up and he wouldn't do it; so the next day we went back in and we locked him in there, still getting after him for higher wages. And he says, "Well, I'll talk it over. I'll be back tomorrow, we'll see what we can do." The next day he didn't come back. So then, we waited for him, we didn't work all that day. He wanted to know why.

EV: (cont) So we had ^{him} locked up in the corner too. So finally they came over and ^{they} gave us a 10¢ increase in our wages.

SD: How old were then, like 16?

EV: I was about 16 then. And then, anyway, I quit the tanneries then, I had to go and work for my uncle then. She was blind, and he had T.B. from the mines like you know. Stone-cutting. So I worked with them for a long time. And then I was back to Chicago again, worked in the garment factory there, and that's how I got married.

SD: So you met your husband, while you were working?

EV: Yeah. I was married at 25 years old.

SD: And you had, in the meantime, been travelling around and working.?

EV: Mhmn. Did housework. I did everything I could think of.

SD: Yeah.

EV: ^(Sighs.) Think of it today, and I say, "Oh god, could I ever do it again! The way I was going around. And there was 16 in our family.

SD: 16 children?

EV: 16 children. That's why I had to quit school, couldn't afford to keep the 16 children and feed them and everything.

SD: So you had to go out and work?

EV: Yeah.

SD: During the Depression, what did you do? Did you go on relief in the States, or in Chicago?

EV: No. When did we start, yes, we were, yes. The Depression started when we were in Chicago. And then his folks wrote

EV: (cont) to him and told him to come out here, that they would set him up in business. ^{But} then when we got out here, they didn't set him up in business, so we had to struggle for ourselves then, after we came to Canada.

SD: And that was during the ^{war?}

EV: That was during the Depression, ^{so} he went off, was it, his sister was in, he had a sister that was a, had a store, and she was selling ladies' goods and all that. So she gave him a bunch of dresses and told him to go out and sell them and make a little bit of money. He went out and he just about went broke on that, so then he ^{says,} "To heck with it." So we stood around and waited, ^{to} see what we could do with what little money we had, we spent our last cent before we went down and asked ^{for} relief.

SD: It must have been fairly humiliating for people to ask for relief who'd been working.

EV: It was. It was terrible! There was a place there where you could go, they'd give you clothes for your kids and everything; I wouldn't ask for it, I'd go up to the nursing mission, get some old clothes, and I'd wash it, ^{fix} it all for my kids, and there'd be stockings, and clothes and everything.

SD: So they wouldn't have to wear clothes...

EV: Yup.

SD: Could everyone tell that you were on relief by the clothes that they gave you?

EV: No, but I used to do all that sewing. I did good sewing, if I have to say so. You can tell the difference; the only

EV: (cont) thing is they were expensive clothes, was all expensive stuff, you see.

SD: Would relief give you money for food?

EV: They did after. I think we were, my brother-in-law was a lawyer; we brought him at the house, and we told him about it. And he says, "You get down ~~there~~ tomorrow; you'll get something." So we went down and got it through him, my brother-in-law.

SD: Were any people around you in your community on relief?

EV: Oh yes, oh yes. That was in Lethbridge.

SD: Oh yeah.

EV: Alberta. They were all on relief then.

SD: The prairies, was hit very hard by the '30s.

EV: Oh yeah. And you had to know the guy that was going around your relief; you had people going and investigating your house to see what you had and didn't have. My husband was one of those, because it was a big organization as well out there. He went into one of the houses where the guy said that this guy had so much clothes he didn't need any. So my husband, ~~he~~ went in there. The guy didn't have a goddamn thing.

SD: So your husband worked for an unemployed organization?

EV: Yup.

SD: So there was organizing on the unemployed in Alberta as well as in British Columbia?

EV: Yup.

SD: What kind of struggles took place out there?

EV: I was so busy [] with the kids, ^{sewing,} I didn't have a minute

EV: (cont) to myself there, when you sew for a bunch of kids like that to keep them going. But they were ^{me} after ~~to~~ to join the organization but I couldn't join.

SD: Were women organized at all during the Depression? Were there Womens Labour Leagues out there?

EV: Oh yes.

SD: What did they do?

EV: I couldn't say what they did but I know that they were organized cause, and then that's when my husband belonged ^{the} to CCF then.

SD: Right.

EV: So I didn't get too much of an education, then jump around like this, I don't know how I ever did it.

SD: There's different kinds of education, maybe.

EV: (laughter) Well, as I always tell my kids, I didn't get mine out of a book, I got mine through experience (laughs).

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