

EVA WILSON:

My name is Eva Wilson. I was born in Nanaimo about seventy years ago. My dad was a miner. I do remember my mother and dad, Oh My God, he was against unions, because Dad and them, they all had good jobs.

We arrived here after Fred got fired for organizin' the miners. There was no organization, [REDACTED] The scow that went from Number One to Protection, was called the 'We Too'. So he edited this paper and it came out for a long, long time; it was called the We Too, but it was "We Too Want a Square Deal". When they found out who was editing the paper, out he went. So, that was that. We were married in thirty-three, and he must have been doing it before, but I didnt' know anything about it until after we were married.

We came to Youbou on the twenty-fourth of May for a weekend, and I been here ever since. Fred got a job at Youbou, [REDACTED] then lost that. We came down here in thirty-four ('36?), when the loggers walked over the back of the mountain and came down to pull the mill out. Fred was working on the loading deck. He was the only (one?) that came out in sympathy with the loggers, and Red, Ken Rendall, he walked back and forth on that loading deck, couldn't make up his mind whether to come out in sympathy [REDACTED] or not, but he finally stayed on the job. Fred "worked" for a week and a half and never let me know; tryin' to let on [REDACTED] that he was still working. I put up his lunch every morning. I was never so mad in all my life 'cause he had promised me he would never organize again. But that was a laugh. He was on the picket line. When I found out, Oh God, was I mad! Jesus! Well you would have been too, making his lunch for a whole week and a half.

Eva Wilson con't.

EVA: [REDACTED] What could I do?! (Laughs.) Married, with one baby. Sharon would be [REDACTED] five months old when we came here in May. We'd been married the year and a half before.

LIL: You couldn't [REDACTED] leave your husband in those days, with a family, could you? No car or no money to go anywhere with, you had to stick it out. If you didn't have independence there was nothing to do.

EVA: If I'd ha' known about it, I'd 'a been the first one to do it (Laughs.) The mine was only working about one or two days a week. I was anti-union, against everything, mostly myself. (Laughs.) I never did settle down to that, even though the active [REDACTED] part I took in it. No, I used to be [REDACTED] me everybody; I was really bitter.

Well, we didn't have a darn thing. We had two rooms. When we first came to the Lake, we were in where the forestry station is now; there was two shacks there. I lived in one of those. It was the Red Light District. Fred was workin' at Lake Loggin' then. That was the Red Light District, because all night long [REDACTED] there was people knocking at my door. And Mrs.-----, she was quite an active [REDACTED] member when it got going. I can't think of her name; better left unsaid anyway.

LILLIAN GODFREY

LIL: My name was Harriet Lillian Greenwell. They [REDACTED] called me TOTS and then they called me Harriet [REDACTED] at school, and then I got called Lillian, which is my second name. I was born in Extension in 1915 and my father was involved in coal mining. And of course my mother along with him. She was looking after the children. They were married in 1911 and she had three of us by 1915; the strike was in 1912, 1914. My father was in jail when the miners were put in jail from Extension. She said the younger sisters of hers would be going over to the trials. The trials were held in New Westminster, but she couldn't go [REDACTED] back

Lillian Godfrey con't.

LIL: and forth with the children on the train, so she would [redacted] just have to tough it out at home. (She had worked before she was married, in Victoria, sewing overalls. She wasn't married too young)...Then we moved, first to Nanaimo; after the miners' strike I guess my [redacted] father worked for the co-operative in Nanaimo. Then he got work in the mines in South Wellington, He died in 1924. So mother was left [redacted] with four of us. She had to just go out and work and wash clothes, sew and that type of thing. We had another brother [redacted] born about a month after he died. Then, he died when he was six [redacted] weeks old. The following July our house was burnt down. It just shows what [redacted] conditions were. [redacted] After my dad died, he'd had no compensation or money or anything. So she got widow's pension which was fifty-five dollars a month for herself and four of us. When our house burnt down she had fifteen hundred dollars, fire insurance. So they took her pension away from her and made her live on it for ten or eleven months. Before they'd give it back to her they wanted an itemized list of how she had spent this money. Part of the insurance money was owing on the [redacted] house, she didn't even have fifteen hundred. Anyway, she worked and saw that we all got high school education because she said if anything ever happened to any of us after we were married she wanted us to be able to support ourselves, not like she was left-to go out and wash clothes and floors. So I was very fortunate. [redacted] With the help of my brother [redacted] and others, I had a scholarship and I got to [redacted] Victoria College and to Normal School and became a teacher. That was in the early [redacted] thirties. Regardless of education, as it is to-day, you couldn't get a school, unless maybe you went up to the Wild West somewhere and it wasn't my cup of tea. So, I went out and did housework [redacted] for ten dollars a month. Taught for one year [redacted] before I was married [redacted] in 1937. We came to Lake Cowichan and have been here ever since. Married a logger.

LIL: My brother, who is Mary's husband, was active in organizing [redacted] the miners in Nanaimo, He [redacted] came down here and started to work with the loggers, in 1934, when they had their first strike. When I came here, he was already here, what I didn't know, he was trying to prod me along to do anyway. I didn't join the auxiliary because I had my son in 1938, didn't become involved in the auxiliary until 1940.

[redacted] Mary Greenwell

MARY: I don't have a long story like that to tell. (Laughter.) [redacted] I was born in Chicago and lived in Victoria from the time I was ten months old til 1941 when I married Archie Greenwell. I had my first experience with unions about a year after I married him,

LIL: What do you mean! Whne you [redacted] married him he took off to a convention. (Laughter.)

MARY: Well, he did, but myself, I never had anything to do with it. I was too busy with children. I didn't know what it was all about! I'd never been [redacted] raised in that kind of family. My father was very anti union. He was superintendent of the Sweeney Cooperage. Archie said he'd been down there organizing . He says it was my father that kicked him out. My father never did meet Archie.

I worked in a five and ten cent store, Woolworth's. I done housework, low pay; cut the hay. We made fifteen dollars a week at Woolworth's and you worked long hours and you didn't fool around in those days. You kept on your toes the whole time. If you were seen talking to anyone you got told off by the boss: 'Don't talk, you're wasting time [redacted] Miss Ward.' I'd never been used to this kind of [redacted] life, but, oh, I liked it after I got into it. I thought it was alright (that my husband was a unionist). He seemed to be doing what I thought should be done for working people. I always felt that poor people were not getting enough out of life even when I was living at home. I couldn't



LAKE COWICHAN W.A. Depression Personal Histories 5.5.5.

figure my dad talking the way he did. We never had too much, there was seven of us in the family and he wasn't working for that high a wage either. [REDACTED]
I had a feeling that justice wasn't being done, anyway.

(Laughter,)

JUNE OLSEN

JUNE: My name is June Olsen, used to be June Eckert. I was born in Forestburg, Alberta, June twenty-first, Nineteen twenty-seven. Dad was working in the coal mines there, but my mum's parents had come up here in 1923 and things were really [REDACTED] tough back there, in Forestburg, so they decided to come out. Mum was lonely, she came from a big family so they come out to visit them. A taxi brought them from Duncan out to the Lake and they had to go by boat out to the float house at the Lake [REDACTED] and arrived at night and started handing kids over. (Laughter.) Grandma said, 'My God, it's Marge and Jake.' They never left here. My great uncle Neil was logging superintendent. In fact they owned McDonald and Murphy, up here. He marched with the workers to get better conditions; he was really respected. They used to have a blacklist if you tried to organize. Uncle Neil would always hire the guys on the blacklist. He always said they were the best loggers that ever were. (Laughter.) They really worked. Then, we were [REDACTED] educated here, lived here. I got married to a local boy, Nels Olsen. We started school together and we got married in the same schoolhouse that we started Grade One in. It got changed to the church. In 1946, right [REDACTED] before I was married I worked in the bakery at eighteen dollars a week and I figured that was something. That was from 7.30 in the morning till 5.30 at night.

I had three brothers and a sister and they were all loggers and my dad was a graderman. Evidently they all got to be union and Nels, who I married, his

[REDACTED]

June Olsen con't

JUNE: parents are really strong union and when we were first married, that was when we were trying to break away from the States . We used to have people come in and stay at our house, like Harold Pritchett and Aylmer and George Grafton.

I joined the auxiliary when I was sixteen and I went on the trek. (I joined the auxiliary before I was married) because of all the people I knew. My mum was in the auxiliary, and my sister was in the auxiliary and all our friends were in the auxiliary, and future mother-in-law, she was a charter member.

You used to hear them talk about conditions in the logging camps, how they treated the men, and the food, and how they sleep like animals. When my husband went out on strike, he always said they had to have the support of their wives because they're the only ones that had to put the food on the table and look after the family. If you didn't have your wife supporting you, he said you would never have won a strike.

GN:

LAURIE BELI

LAURIE: I'm Laurie Belign and I came to Lake Cowichan in 1936 and I don't think I was here more than four weeks when that strike was called. I came in April and this was in May.

JUNE: That was when they built their picket camp. I remember Archie and all different ones-they went up to Courtenay way and slept on the beaches there, trying to organize.

LAURIE: I came from Vancouver before I came here, but I was born in North Dakota. When I first came here I only came for a month. I'm still here another forty-five years pretty near. They were always after me to join the auxiliary and it took two years before I joined. I didn't join until May of 1938. Bertha finally

LAURIE BELIGN

LAURIE: came and got me to go to the meeting. I learned, and like ~~the~~ say, I had to change my mind about alot of things that I wasn't accustomed to living under, the activities of unionism.

LAKE COWICHAN W.A. DEPRESSION ██████████ CONDITIONS 1.1.1.1.1.1.

██████████ Housing; Power:

LAURIE: We just lived in a cabinx really when we first came. I guess they called them shacks.

LIL: There was no indoor plumbing, no electric light, no running water. We had a well which we had to go pump water out of. The a fellow, by the name of Pete Olsen. installed a small water system. We had to have spring taps. You couldn't waste any water and you didn't have hot water; it was just cold water on the back porch, outside where we'd do our washing. At first we had gas lamps or coal oil lamps, that was after 1937. No washing machines, no electric irons; there was no power xperiod. The first electricity that we had was run on a big diesel engine down at the corner here-and you couldn't use applicances on it, just mainly light, and one at a ████████ time. There was an engine hooked up to a water system and lights would go out at one o'clock in the morning; you had to have all your work done by then. And if you got up on early shift, which the loggers had to do in those days, you wouldn't have any light. You'd have to go back to ████████ the coal oil lamp or gas lamp.

LAURIE: In the summer the water got low, ████████ it would be a little yellow flicker up there.

LIL: It was water powered, sot there was poor power there. Then they introduced this diesel plant which boosted the power.

EVA: I thought I'd come to the last place on earth when I first came here. It was all bush anyway, for a start, An old fellow gave the lot we're living on now to the Auxiliary. I bought the lot, I could have had a section of the land for ten dollars - it was Crown grant land, which is ████████ valuable property right now, but it was way the heck on in the bush.

XXXX LAURIE: We didn;t have ten dollars, we couldn't buy no lot when we first came here, 'cause we never had ████████ money to buy it.

LIL: This lot ████████ here we bought in thrity-seven, we had a three room house, no plumbing, no electricity, and a lot, for four hundred and fifty dollars.

LAKE COWICHAN W.A. DEPRESSION CONDITIONS 2.2.2.

Accidents, Healthcare:

LAURIE: They used to log quite close, right down in here, when we first came. You could hear the whistles from the wood. And they knew: so many whistles would be a death, so many whistles would be an accident. And all the women would gather, the women would all get together and wait for that. It was seven whistles was a death. And they used to just be terrified for the next whistle. I used to come up to where Skolie's store was. Whenever the ambulance went by, you went down, just to see who it was, whether it was your own or who it was that they carried out by the ambulance. That was scary.

MARY: It was someone you knew anyways. It was a closely knit community, you knew who it was.

LIL: One of the first projects of the auxiliary was to demand a better road from Lake Cowichan to Duncan because even as yet, the hospital was in Duncan. When our men got hurt in the woods, they felt that they deserved the best road to get there as fast as possible.

When I had my son, in 1938, I had to go to Chemainus for him to be born. You'd go to a doctor here at the Lake and then you're whisked down there in the middle of the night and have a doctor who had never seen you before and be in the hospital there for two weeks. They used to say that the doctors here, to come to us, it was considered isolation. It was a standing joke, 'Well, we sent them out to practice on the loggers and their families.' And when they got good enough they'd branch out to Duncan or Victoria and we'd get another new one until they'd practiced enough.

WAGES:

EVA: When we were at Youbou Fred was working on the green chain, which is one of the hardest jobs in the mill and he was getting two twenty-five a day at that time. The mill worked six days a week. Then he lost that job. Well,

LAKE COWICHAN W.A. Depression Conditoins 3.3.3.3.

WAGES Con't/

EVA: the loggers, they're out in the summer for fire season; they're out in the winter fir snow. There's one year Fred worked a month and a half ahat was the year they came out in October or November for snow. We dealt at Stanley Gordon's and he got a cheque for forty-eight dollars. So he took it to Stanley Gordon. He says, 'No Fred, you take that home, I refuse to take it.' Fred says, 'Well, that's done all all I got,' He says, 'You take that cheque. You've you possibly cuold do. Go buy yourself a bottle and get the kids something for Christmas.' At that time we owed Stanley Gordon for groceries alone seven hundred and fifty dollars.

LAURIE: 'One of our dead horses' they used to say in the spring when they started again, 'cause you had all that grocery money to pay back.

EVA: I worked for years and years. I swore then that I would give Stanley Gordon the last cent I had and we just got the last twenty-five dollars paid off when he died. You know, it was really funny, but it took me years to pay that seven hundred and fifty dollars.

JUNE: There was no such thing as holiday pay. You weren't supposed to get holidays. You were just at their beck and call.

LIL: No unemployment insureance or sick benefits.

LAURIE: I think the fallers when we first came were making about five dollars a day and that was the hand falling.

JUNE: Tnen they went to the four men and the big saws that weighed a hundred and wighty pounds.

LAURIE: The average wage was five dollars and they used to get ninety-five cents a thousand when they felled timber. Then, if they got a raise, it probably was five cents, ten cents, at the most. The others only made two twenty-five.

LIL: Of course, the conditions were really hell. ^{But} When we were married in '37,

WAGES Con't:

IL: Ralph was bringing home around one hundred and forty-five to one hundred and fifty dollars a month. Out of that, he was able to [redacted] saty home. There [redacted] was [redacted] a private family [redacted] that run a speeder to camp and they had to pay five dollars a month for their speeder ride. Which always bugs me in proportion to the money they were receiving. That was a six ^{day} week, until 1946.

CAMPS:

JUNE: ANother reason I think they formed a union is due to working conditions, unsafe conditions and the treatment alot of the men got. You didn't have any guarantee of working. If the boss just didn't like the colour of your eyes he could fire you. You didn't have any protection. Also, alot of the men had to go out of the woods by speeder and they worked a six day week. They used to bring the speeder down Wednesday night and they'd come down to their families for two hours and then they's have to go back into camp. Then they'd come out Saturday night and have to be back in camp Sunday night. SO there was really no family life. The men got to see their kids maybe two hours Wednesday night and then overnight Saturday. That's another reason.

The [redacted] men really fought and rebelled [redacted] against the food in the cookhouses. Thy used to feed them anything at first. The men had to organize: they were doing hard work so they had to have [redacted] proper food.

LAURIE: You were just a 'grass widow'. The only men that were around would be the butcher, and Mr. Gordon, the baker and the [redacted] blacksmith and the rest of us were all just women. All you saw was women and children.

JUNE: I can remember going to meet the speeder. Everybody in town used to meet the speeder. Gordon's store, he always kept the door open and we used to get a big nickel bag of peanuts, that was our treat. We could hardly wait for Dad come in and open his suitcase because you'd get oranges. We didn't get [redacted] fresh fruit like that. [redacted] They wouldn't eat it in thier lunch, so they

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LAKE COWICHAN W.A. Depression CONDITIONS 5.5.5.5.5.

JUNE: could bring it home for us kids.

EVA: We'd go so we'd get the money off them. (Laughter.) That's why the women walked all in a body up across. Otherwise these floozies would meet them first. That's the truth. I can tell who the floozies are too, they are very highly respected to-day. (Laughter.)

LAURIE: We used to walk up to the speeder on Sunday night and then, of course, the women would get together; we usually landed at Bertha's place, remember? We'd sit there and crochet until [redacted] three o'clock in the morning [redacted]

LIL: I guess the auxiliaries really, in the beginning, were just more a social get-together for company's sake, rather than thinking of taking an active part in the union.

JUNE: Do you remember, they had the [redacted] big fire and moved everybody into the community hall? All the women brought sandwiches and [redacted] everybody made up an emergency place so that everybody would be sheltered at the hall. All the women went home and made [redacted] big things of soup. It was so close to where we lived.

LAURIE: I can remember when the shack burned next door to us. We were sitting playing cards and we didn't even know the shack was burning until Mrs. Cravell yelled, 'Fire, [redacted] Fire, Fire!' [redacted] No fire department in those days. All they did was bring the water from that little creek; the men just kept throwing water on our shack so it wouldn't [redacted] burn.

LAKE COWICHAN W.A. Depression Beginnings of Women's Auxiliary 1.1.1.1.

LAURIE: Bergie [redacted] and Edna Brown more or less got the auxiliary started.

EVA: They came into our house that night, we only had the two rooms, and they're trying to talk me into it. Well, to keep peace in the family I joined, that was the only [redacted] thing I think. I think the auxiliary was formulated right in our house because they used to hold all the meetings [redacted] there, Edna, Gully Olsen, [redacted] and I'm almost sure Mrs. Gorenson, and Julie and Ellen Tasset, [redacted] Mrs. Banting and Mrs. Banting's sister, Lydia.

I was practically taking a real good active part in it because Fred and Archie and Hjalmar were travelling by boat, sometimes they had to swim too, go to Camp Six in a rowboat and they'd come home at three or four o'clock in the morning, they were trying to organize one of the camps, see. I would have a great [redacted] big pot of stew or something ready for them. They'd be frozen. They stayed a lot at my place.

JUNE: The men used to have to supply them with shoes, they didn't have anything. Nels said Hjalmar got the whole [redacted] big sum of fourteen dollars a month.

Then he'd turn it back in, he wouldn't buy shoes and some guys [redacted] would round up a pair of shoes; you know, 'This is the guy that organized!' and Edna, I guess [redacted] she thought, 'Well, there's no way; somebody's got to help these guys. They're trying to help our husbands and get them better conditions.' She talked to the women.

LAURIE: When I got acquainted with Edna she talked auxiliary, but I was very cautious about joining because I had never done anything like that before. [redacted] I didn't understand.

JUNE: A lot of men didn't think women had any business really.

LAURIE: Belign, he had been unionized from the time he was a youngster because he was brought up with it in Sweden. He didn't push me, he just let me decide for myself. Finally I did join. It took me two years to make up my mind to go in.

EVA: There may have been (some men who stopped their wives from being involved). Everybody we knew was in the auxiliary. We were all loggers wives.

LAKE COWICHAN W.A. Depression Beginnings of W.A. 2.2.2.2.

LAURIE: They never deprived us from joining the auxiliary. As a matter of fact they really urged us to belong.

EVA: My first dance at Lake Cowichan: Fred wouldn't have thought anything of it but you should have seen the looks I got when I got there. There was loggers' boots, there was everything there, but me, in a long slinky black evening gown, no backing, spike heel shoes walking along the track and up through the bushes to get to his place. I had no idea where it was. Nobody attended anything in those clothes - they had sweaters and skirts. Up at the picket camp you had to sit on blocks of wood. They kept looking at me as if I was something from another world, with a backless evening gown on at a picket camp. This was in thirty-five or thirty-six.

JUNE: I went to dances at the picket camp. It wasn't very big but there was always dances there. Remember the wood piles that sat on the verandah? One night Neil and Andy Bell had a fight and there was wood flying every which way;

LIL: I always remember that we had a basket social and it was at the picket camp. It must have been the coldest night on record and the women brought the baskets and then they picked partners. It was Mrs. Olsen who we didn't think would do anything, but did she have Archie for a partner. She had a little bottle of liquor in her basket for her partner and she was the most popular. You really needed it that night.