

Labour History
August 1, '01

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I've lived a lot of places.

We lived in Manitoba and we lived there. My father was a business man. He gambled on the grain exchange and in 1929 pow! Everything was gone. Shot.

My father's broker killed himself and a lot of his associates went that way. We were very poor after that. My father left, because he thought they wouldn't take our house if the man of the house was gone. Well that didn't happen. We lost everything. My mother worked for a time as housekeeper. My father and family got back together again. He looked for us, we looked for him. We got back together again. Then we lived in Edmonton, in poor surroundings of course. Cold Water Flats, as everybody did in those days. North Edmonton, there was a place called the Martell Block. It was Cold Water Flats. Very poor people lived there. Everybody on welfare. There were wood stoves. It was sort of a converted hotel. There were wood stoves. You actually had to haul your wood up. The Hope Mission bought us food. As I said, the head of the family did not get welfare relief; only the mother and children.

Really dark days. And we went out the dump, we kids, and we found a bunch of wheels. We had 4 different wheels and we made up a wagon. We went all through the city and picked up wood boxes and broke them down and made kindling and sold it. We were enterprising little devils. Poor, but always on the go. Street kid, ya. But very strong background of family values. My mother said, you stay honest. Whatever happens you stay honest. This family is that way.

Oh yes. We fought kids. We stayed behind Eatons and Woodwards and places like that. That's why I was at the market when the 1932 hunger march happened, because we were there picking up boxes, beating the heck out of the other kids who were there ahead of us. You had to get the stuff to sell it. It was terrible.

Just happened to be there. Although my father was there as well, and I lost him and I worried. I was terrified.

It was winter.

You never forget the sound of heads being clubbed. You never forget that sound, I can say that. To this day I sort of get a little tremble in the lip when I think about it, because I never forgot that. It seemed innocent enough. There were people gathered. People wanted jobs. People wanted decent conditions for their families. None of us could understand why people were starving in a big beautiful half empty country. We couldn't understand. Then all of a sudden the police were there on the horses.

Against the building, the fish market. I was against the building, cringing. Just like a bad dream, couldn't believe it.

Nothing, peaceful crowd.

All I can remember, as a nine year old of course who knows. I'm old, if I don't remember it I'll make it up. No, no, that's not true. There were speeches; that was all. There was singing, but mostly it was speeches that I remember and looking for my father. Suddenly this happened. Then the police got down off their horses as well. People ran for shelter in the pyramids of Christmas trees that were on sale. The clubbing went on. The heads were being clubbed inside the shelter of these trees. Some of it you saw, some of it you heard. But certainly a lot of people were injured.

It was a pyramid where they were stacked, almost like a tepee. They thought they'd be sort of half safe in there, but they weren't. Because that's when the real nastiness went on inside this shelter.

If there were [any weapons] we didn't see them there. Maybe somewhere else in the city there may have been, but there were no weapons. There was nothing.

These were police on horseback. It was pretty scary. You always thought of the policemen as your friend.

.... Then I found my father and of course he said, let's get out of here, let's go. You don't ask a 9 year old to give you a time!

When I was 13, even though we missed 2 years of school when we were with my mother and her housekeeping job and we were very poor and didn't have the clothes to go to school, nobody really cared. If you were wearing socks on your hands and you were in the alleys picking up boxes, the Truant Officer didn't run you down. Although, even though we missed school, we got through quickly. My brothers and I, we couldn't go to school after the 8th grade. I think I was through the 8th grade. When I was 12 or 13 I went to work as a waitress. And you know what? I told them I was 18 of course. We worked 10 hours; that was allowed. And we got a dollar. Then we worked another 2 hours and that was just to hold your job. You had to clean after that, you cleaned the restaurant after that. Then you were released to go home at 2 in the morning. Can you imagine a 13 or 14 year old at 2 in the morning with no streetcars running? You had to walk home. Some of the toughest streets in this city. I tell you, I was like a windmill. I went down those streets, about a mile to walk home- 95 or 96 or 97. I went like a windmill, flinging my arms out, defending myself, fending off guys, arms reaching out of doorways. It was terrifying. Your employer had no responsibility to see that you got home safely. If you

got hurt on the job, just don't bother coming back. There was no workers compensation, there was nothing. There was no protection for the worker, none at all.

Oh quite often you had to quit because your employer just took it for granted that you'd be his next sexual victim. Oh many, many times I walked off a job. I knew how to walk. I walked fast. There really was no protection. Who could you go to?

When the war started there was millions. Everything got better, of course. I got married young. I was married at 17. Of course my husband had a good job, that sort of thing.

Then during the war, when the war was just over we went to the United States. We lived in California for a few years. Then my husband was injured. We were contractors. We were kicked off our insurance. We were self employed. He broke an ankle, I had trouble with circulation. So we were no longer good risks. So we said the hell with this stuff, we're coming back to Canada. We're going to fight for health care. The fight is going on right now. We went to Saskatoon. What do you know, right in the middle of 1962.

Yes, I was on the street with a petition right there. Another young man and I in the street in Saskatoon in front of Adlemans. The police came along and said that there'd been a complaint. Oh I wanted them to arrest. I asked them to tell me what the complaint was, tell me. Charge me with something. I began to think, oh my god, [what if] they do a body search. Well, I guess I can stand that. But no, he just said well couldn't you go somewhere else? So that was ok. The young cop, he really was sympathetic. But the town was full of Americans, it was just amazing.

Because of course they didn't want Medicare to come in. The doctors went on strike. I think there were 2 doctors who stayed in Saskatoon.

Oh communistic. Do you remember all that crap about communism? My husband's nephew, he was screaming at me calling me a communist and everything else. I'd had

polio a couple of years before that, and I was not in very good shape. Just mild polio. Anyway I was determined that we were going to get health care, and it was going to be implemented July 1st. Saskatchewan has already been in the forefront in the matter of health care, mental care. They were treating tuberculosis, and tuberculosis was rampant. It was for a good many years. What was my point there? Oh yes and this nephew of my husband's, he was calling me a communist and everything else. Medicare was implemented. It wasn't 10 days later that he got spinal meningitis. This young man with a family to support. I said, oh my god. I asked god to slap him around a little bit, but not that. Just enough to smarten him up.

He had a Medicare system. Beautiful.

Well not in the States. Ya, then of course I joined the NDP as soon as I came back. And my dad had always been CCF or whatever, ya. Ya I joined the NDP. Grant Notley was a wonderful man.

I think there's some sort of poisonous aura in this province that makes people stupid. I don't know what it is. Maybe there's too much beer and hockey, I don't know, rednecks. I don't know. Farmers don't need the NDP I guess, and they don't give a damn. It's not like it used to be. Somebody said, during the time of the depression, wasn't there a reason for it? Wasn't there a drought? There was drought in Saskatchewan; there was drought here and there. That wasn't the reason. It was just a matter of not – you know, just distribution, it wasn't there. My god, we'd just come away from child labour. We never progressed much beyond that.

Q: So you don't want them to change the name – NDP?

No, no. And I don't want them to change the name. This is an honourable name. These are the people who got us the labour laws, the workers compensation laws, the Medicare,

pensions. Tommy Douglas and who was the other gentleman sat in the House of Commons until his death? Stanley Knowles, what a dear man. My god, we don't want to change the name. We want to keep it.