



# MOVING FORWARD

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## ALBERTA WOMEN AND WORK

### **Kathleen Andrews: Edmonton's First Lady of Transit**

Kathleen Andrews was the first woman bus driver with the Edmonton Transit System (ETS) - and the first woman in a non-traditional job with the City of Edmonton. She went on to become ETS's first woman dispatcher and the first woman in ETS management.

Kathleen Andrews (nee Smith) was born in Rochdale, England in May 1940. Her father was a transit driver, and taught her how to drive. At age 14, Kathleen and her family immigrated to Canada. They ended up in Edmonton where Kathleen completed school, married and had two children - Brad and Lisa - both of whom also ended up becoming ETS transit drivers.

Kathleen worked in the home until she and her husband divorced in 1970. To support her family, she sought paid employment, eventually landing a job as an Information Clerk with ETS in 1975. But \$3.00 per hour was not enough to support her family, so she inquired about becoming a transit driver. At the time, drivers had to meet a strength requirement. Lisa Andrews explains: "Back when my mom drove you had the trolley buses... it was manual steering. They called it strong arm steering. If you had a full load on a trolley bus you could feel it. Even I would stand up out of my seat just to turn the wheel because the weight of the bus and the manual steering together compounded to make a right-hand turn quite difficult." Kathleen passed the strength test to become ETS's first woman transit driver. Her hourly wage more than doubled to \$7.50, which was on par with male drivers. This was an achievement in its own right, as equal pay for equal work among men and women was uncommon at that time.

Being the first and only woman transit driver with ETS was not without its challenges. Kathleen faced resistance from her male co-workers right from the start. "None of the male trainers wanted to take her," says Lisa, "because she was a woman and they did not want a woman in the ranks." She also faced resistance from passengers, some of whom actually refused to get on her bus. Lisa recalls one of her favourite stories of how her mother dealt with negative attitudes about women drivers: "She was driving the bus late at night and a lady got on the bus and said to her, 'If you knew what was best for your children, you would be at home looking after them and not taking a job from a man.' She turned to this lady and said, 'You know what? I do know what's best for my children. That's why I'm sitting in this seat, busting my butt so that I can bring home an income that can give them a home to grow up in and education and I can feed them.' After that conversation, the woman became her best friend and late at night she'd bring her coffee and sandwiches. So she won the respect of this woman." Kathleen also eventually won the acceptance and respect of her male co-workers. She joined in the tradition of waving to other drivers as they passed as a signal that she was safe.

**Kathleen Andrews reminisces about her first union meeting when she was the only woman member of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 569:**

*At one union meeting, the first one, at the Masonic Lodge, I remember so well all these men around me.*

*And the speaker said, 'Fellow Brothers and...Sister.' And everyone turned around to look at me. Well, I laughed.*

As a transit driver, Kathleen's hours of work were very long and irregular. She eventually applied for and was hired as a dispatcher – another first for a woman with ETS – which gave her routine hours and weekends off. Three years later, she became a Special Services charter officer, making her the first woman in ETS management, the job she held until she retired in 1998. Even after she retired, Kathleen continued to drive school buses.

Kathleen Andrews passed away on 17 November 2013. In 2014, the City of Edmonton announced that the new 500,000 square foot transit garage being built in north Edmonton would be named the Kathleen Andrews Transit Garage, and that three roads in the Ambleside neighbourhood will be named in her honour: Andrews Loop, Andrews Way and Andrews Gates.

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