

Maria Halushka

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Interviewer & Camera: Winston Gereluk

MH: My name is Maria Halushka. I have been with the union now since 1983. The position I hold presently is shop steward at the Stanley Milner Library in the circulation department.

Q: What kind of background did you have?

MH: I was born in Germany. I came to Canada between 1949 and 1950, is when my mother and I came to Canada. My father was already here. He worked for CN and he also used to be a shoemaker. He made shoes for Eaton's. People would order certain sizes and types and he would make them for Eaton's. We moved to Breton, Alberta, which is just a little ways east of Drayton Valley. My parents managed to get a farm there with a lot of hard work. They did get a farm there and they moved in. Because it was so far away from school I had to live in town, so I lived with a lady that I used to call Aunt Edie. She was a little English lady that came from England who helped her father raise their family, then she took in young children that couldn't go to school from out of town. We boarded there, and I was actually her first one. I went to school there from grade 1 to the end of grade 6. Then my parents moved closer to the highway, so I was able to go to school from home. When I finished school I left home and came to Edmonton.

Actually, I'll back up a little bit. My mother was born and raised in Poland. My dad was born in Russia and raised in Poland. My mother was Ukrainian Catholic and my father was Orthodox. The lady I lived with used to love to be able to, she was one of these that would go to both churches that we had in town. In the morning on Sunday we went to Anglican and in the afternoon we went to United church. Then when I was home we'd go to Ukrainian Catholic one time and we'd go to Orthodox the next time. So I kind of got a roundabout feel about religion. When I left home I came to Edmonton. Like a lot of us at that time, I just left home and went. My parents weren't well off enough to send me to university at the time. I couldn't stay around home so I left and came to Edmonton. I remember getting off the bus at the bus depot, going out on the street and standing there looking around thinking, what in the world am I going to do here now? Where am I going? I've got nowhere to go, very little luggage; what am I going to do?

Q: What year was that?

MH: That would've been in 1962, I believe, '62 or '63. I had at one time been on CFRN. They used to have the noon show and I had been on the show at one time. I'd met a lady in Edmonton that played the fiddle there at the same time. When I met her there she'd given me her phone number at that time and said, if you're ever in Edmonton, if you need anything, call me.

So that was the only thing I could remember, was this phone number. I phoned her and told her who I was. I said, I have absolutely nowhere to go. Do you mind if I stay at your place so I can at least have a roof over my head? I'll find a job and go from there. I said, I'll even sleep on the floor, I don't care, as long as I have somewhere to be.

So she did. She had a little house where the coliseum is now. She had her husband, herself and two boys living in this very tiny house. I did sleep on the couch and stayed there for about two weeks. My first job was at the bus depot. I had no idea how to be a waitress. I walked in and told them that, yep, I know how to do this and I know how to do that. They hired me and I worked there for the summer. One of the waitresses there had a room in her house that she rented. We were making 50 cents an hour or something at that time. Those weren't union wages of any sort, but anyway. She rented me a room and I worked there through the summer. I had been thinking about going back home and when the summer came, after that I decided not to.

Then I worked in a grocery store, at Cushing's Grocery for a while. Everything was fine there until I got really upset with the owner's wife. She was a retired schoolteacher and when she came in she was one of those people who love to order people around. It was do the shelves, do this, do that. That little grocery store was on Jasper and 113th. We used to deliver to the Lamarchand Mansion so you had to keep the groceries nice and neat and always fresh, like the unions and stuff like that. One day she just got on the wrong side of me and I went up to Mr. Cushing and said, you know, it's been lovely working here, but as long as your life is here, I'm afraid I'm going to have to leave, I can't take this anymore. He just said, no you can't go, you can't go. I said, well it's either me or she goes home, one or the other. Because she wasn't there before; he used to run it by himself. Well he couldn't tell his wife to go home, so I left. Then I got a job at Shipley Photo Service.

I worked at Shipley's and during that time I got married. I was married to Mike Nebuluk. I was there during the time that Kennedy got shot, that's when I was working for Shipley's. I worked there for several years and then pregnant and had my children, so I stopped working there. We ran apartment blocks, we managed apartment blocks and that was my job from home, being at home as a mother and looking after apartments. We did that for quite a few years, I'd say about six or seven years, then we moved to our first home we got in Dickensfield. When we still lived in the apartments I had my oldest daughter, and when we moved to Dickensfield we had our younger daughters. Then we decided to start a business in excavating, because there was nobody around. We needed a job done and couldn't find anybody to do it so we thought, what the heck, we'll start one ourselves. So we ran that for probably about 10 or 12 years. Eventually we moved into another part of Castle Downs, we still ran the business, and things started getting a little tough. The excavating business, the whole economy in the late '70s things started to go bad. The business was costing more money so I thought, I should go to work to supplement this somehow. So I beat the pavement for a while, applied at several places.

I applied at the Edmonton Public Library, which was called the Centennial Library at that time. I waiting two weeks and I got a call and they told me to come and have an interview. I went for an interview and I didn't hear from them for another week. Apparently what had happened is someone else had gotten hired, she didn't like it, and within that week left. So I guess I was sort of runner up, and I got the job. I was hired by Maxine Macahonick and Jennifer Beulah. I started working at the library in October of 1982. At that time we did have a shop steward. That's when I was first introduced to unions. I didn't really have a lot of idea about them before that. There was a bit of an orientation they gave us, not much at that time. I started gathering more interest when I was there. The shop steward at the time was Will Hudson. He was a little upset because he said he didn't like going to the meetings simply because sometimes there was a little conflict and he wasn't really into that kind of thing. I said to him, "Well if you're not going to come back and tell us what's happening and we don't get the information, then maybe just hand it over to me and I'll do it." He said, okay, "I'll give it to you, you do it."

So that was my first introduction into being a shop steward. After that, I can't tell you the exact years that all this happened; however I got quite involved with it. I ran for position of recording secretary, got that. Then I ran for position of, several years later, I think I was recording secretary about five years and then I ran for vice president. I think at one time we had three vice presidents. So I was third vice president, then I moved up to second vice president, and that was probably another five or six years in that position. Then we were into the '90s. When I first started as recording secretary it was under Shirley Wood. Her campaign, we all really dug in and helped with her campaign when she was running for president. I can't remember the exact year that Shirley was elected – was it '90. Anyway, there were a few of us that got together. There was Lanny at that time, there was myself, there was Shirley, Sonia. Frank Zaprawa had been the president and it seemed like a lot of union funds were being mismanaged, things were happening that really weren't good for the union as a whole. So we ran a campaign. I ran for the recording secretary, I believe Lanny ran for the vice presidents position, and I'm not sure.

Shirley ran for president, and I can't remember who the other two people were that ran for the other two positions at this point in time. But we really got a campaign behind her. It wasn't that we decided that this person should be the president, I think it was more as to who will run against Frank. She was willing to take that chance. Being a female, we thought, hey maybe this will work out better. We all stood out on the street corners, handed out pamphlets. I even had one daughter and a friend of hers; they were going to Vic Comp at the time. You know the old thing about sex sells? Well we had them dressed in little short tops and they had these little flyers in their hands. They stood one downtown and one over by the Boardwalk. People remembered them more than anything else and I think the votes went that way too. They handed these things out and everybody said how cute they were. So anyway, we got Shirley in that year.

Q: What kind of person was she?

MH: Actually Shirley appeared to be a really fair person. She didn't have a lot of experience in this sort of thing so it was quite a learning experience for her at the time.

She tried; she really tried hard. Then I think there were some things that must have happened within not so much the union itself, but there were some internal problems with staff and that sort of thing. There again, these kind of jobs take a lot of experience. You have to really learn quickly, you have to be able to know what to do next to keep your staff happy. I don't think she knew how much of that was involved and how much she'd really have to work at.

Females tend to be a little uptight when there's females in the office running sometimes. They're less likely to be as judgmental with a male as they would with another female. So that way there was a little problem, but she tried hard. I do say that there were some things she did that did help out. The union kept running, we kept going, we weren't losing money anymore. I think there might have been a period of burnout for her too, so at one point she decided she would like to resign. We had to do that at a board meeting. We voted on it. She really did want to leave and we knew that, and we knew that if we voted no she'd just be a position that she didn't want to be in any longer. So we voted and she moved on out and then Peter Neuschafer took over. He must have been the first vice president then instead of Lanny. So it wouldn't been Peter. He took over for a short period of time and then we had an election in the fall Marion, who happened to have been Shirley's executive assistant, he ran for the position and got it. At that time I was still recording secretary under him for several years. About four years after, I ran for the vice presidency and got that one. Then I kept running every two years and kept my position way up until Donna Damion ran for recording secretary. So I was actually vice president for quite some time, probably about ...

Q: What's Shirley's legacy?

MH: I think with Shirley there, there was a little more peace within the union. It was like we started all over again making things more solid. It was a complete transition again, like the whole union was starting over again, because of what had happened previously. Things were trying to be a little more honest and a little more truthful. She didn't have a lot of time to do that, but I would say that she started a whole new transition where the union was actually trying to make itself completely better. Everybody was trying to work together. We still had a few difficulties, you always do, but during her time it did seem a lot more peaceful.

Q: What kind of person was Marion and how did the executive proceed to rebuild the union?

MH: When Marion came in, there again, there were a lot of changes made. After some years we ended up hiring an in-house legal, which was a benefit in some ways because we could always get our legal's opinion right there, we didn't have to go outside. There was still a lot of, I wouldn't say battles, but a lot of issues, a little bit within the union itself but a lot of issues that had to keep getting resolved. Like I said, Shirley had started a whole new transition and then Marion came in and there were still some things that were left from the Zaprawa era that had to be cleaned up. Business agents then were being hired, we weren't having so much our own people. They were still our members that were

being hired, if possible, but business agents were being hired so they were there. Then they started their own union as well so they would have the same rights that we had. I think Judy Jacobs was one person that was quite instrumental in that. She made us see what the benefits would be to do this. I know that was a bit of a battle getting it through as well, but it eventually went through. I don't think it's jeopardized anything within our union. They have their rights, they have their contract just like we would.

Q: It was right around '93 or '94 that the big cutbacks started, and you were still on the executive then, right?

MH: Yes. I actually also sat on several negotiating committees with the library. That was the years when we were able to get, even though there were cutbacks, and that would've been during Marion's time, the library was able to get some decent raises and percentages. I can't tell you exactly what the percentages were, but we were moving up. We had been the lowest for the longest time and we had moved up and got a lot of concessions that a lot of others didn't. That worked really well there at that time.

Q: What were some of the issues employees faced?

MH: Apart from our low pay, because we piggyback on the main units, our medical is always the same. But there were other things, like making certain that they didn't hire a lot of part timers so that there'd be full time jobs. Not just the wages, but technological change. We had to make certain that the change wouldn't take up jobs for people, that they would actually still have their positions. Also part timers, making certain that so many part timers weren't hired that the full time positions would be eroded. I think that's always been a bit of a problem there. A lot of it was little things within the library that would happen. I can't really categorize them for you. There were a lot of little issues, like safety issues and that sort of thing, which people may not understand.

Q: Could you explain that a bit?

MH: The safety issues were things like, for instance, shelving, which may not mean anything to the ordinary individual. But if it could fall on someone's head it could actually be loose and hurt one of our staff members. And the public as well, we have to consider that. There were certain gates that they would have up that needed to be changed because a little child could run through and get smacked in the face. We were looking at those sort of things that we were making changes. At that time there was myself and Stewart Bean, and Amanda Hall at one point ended up being on one of our negotiating committees with me as well. We had Judy Jacobs as our business agent in negotiations those years and we did really well then, we really moved up. I can't exactly remember all of our issues as far as libraries go. I know that at that time wages was a big thing because we were doing a lot of work and getting far less pay than the rest of the city was at that time, and far less than what other libraries within Canada were getting. We were way down on the bottom, so that one we really wanted to raise and make sure we were par with at least most of them. I know people don't realize that libraries have issues. They say, oh you must read all day. Well that's not possible.

Q: What sort of work did you do in the library?

MH: The same thing I'm doing now. Well, actually, I started out as a page for three months. I paged books. A page puts away all the materials, the books, in either Dewey decimal order or alphabetical, whichever is required. I worked that for three months and we had some staff members who were in the paging pool that were quite, females again, you have a paging pool of nothing but females and they can be very catty and whatever. I remember walking up to my boss at one point and saying, look, if you want me to work there, fine, you have to do something about these two women. They were two sisters that liked to pick on other staff. Either do something about them or I'm going to have to leave. I'd sooner work with ten men than two of those women. Well my boss at that time didn't want me to leave so he said to me, Skip Wilson actually, a little while when a position came up he said, I want you to apply for it. So he got me out of the paging pool within three months and I went into what they called level I at that time, which would've been like a clerk I. I worked as a clerk I, and then the classification changed. So we've moved up since then. I worked in that position ever since. I did apply for some supervisory ones and wasn't successful, so that's okay.

Q: What does a clerk do?

MH: We do things like the checkouts, the check-ins, the distribution. There are a lot of internal jobs that you do within that classification. Circulation assistant, I guess is what they call them. But now it's moved up to now we are considered circulation assistant III. Our duties have changed considerably. They have slowly managed to merge things where even though we're kind of doing the same job, more has been added. More has been added so that we're doing the work of the library assistant IVs now. We're still circ assistants but library assistants are a little bit higher and we do their work as well. So it's the whole transition has changed. Now I notice that our wages haven't really kept up with that. The years have changed and you haven't been able to get the raises that you used to.

Q: Why is the library so important to Edmonton? What changes have you seen over the years?

MH: Libraries are important to the people of Edmonton simply because you can find all the information you need there. You can come there, the staff will help you look for whatever topic you're trying to write about or even some university work that you might need. For instance, if children come in or university students come in and can't find it in the school libraries, they come to Edmonton Public. The people up in the reference department will help them locate whatever it is they want.

We do have a history area where all the history is kept, which is our heritage room. People like to read. A lot of our older seniors in Edmonton like to come in and get library books. We have a library access department that actually takes books out. Volunteers come and take books out to people that are shut in or in senior centers. A lot of it gets taken out there. They appreciate that because the senior centers don't keep big libraries.

So we ship these out to them and then someone brings them back. Our drivers do a lot of that.

We are now associated with the Alberta library system as well, so now you can get a card where you can go somewhere and borrow five items at any library in Alberta. You can also drop your materials off at any library in Edmonton and it gets back to its home library. However, there is such a thing that we call floating items, so wherever they end up, that's where they stay.

The staff of the library are being sent out to schools. We do things like story time, school visits. They show them things, bring out books and show them what kind of books are available. They do stories for children. So people are doing programs constantly out in the public. There is some community work done as well, even with some of the homeless places. There are librarians that have been hired that will go out now into the community where the homeless are housed and make arrangements for books and information. A lot of information comes back and forth. For instance, I pack up a lot of books that we get as donations that the library is not able to use, and I send that off to PALS, which is adult literature here in Edmonton. They need as many books as they can get. They were saying that in this generation now they have a lot of 30 and 35 year olds that left school and cannot read properly or write properly. So they offer the reading and writing, and they say that any book they can get is fine, because they need them to learn how to read. Everything I feel we can't use at all, or if we've got too much of something, I just send it off to them.

The library has gotten more mechanized, computerized. We were in the computer system way back in the '80s already. I think this is our third changeover in computers, that I can remember. Now we have self check-in and self checkout. You go in there, you want to check your material out, you put it on this pad. It's all computerized, you put your card under, it takes its number, then you put the books on and it checks them out. We now have what they call a self check-in, where you put a book in and a conveyor belt takes it in and it all drops off in bins. That's your self check-in. The thing that most of the staff were worried about is that when we got the self check-in whether or not we would lose staffing. In actuality, what it's done is created more work. It sounds strange but none of the staff lost work, because the way this thing is operated you still need the same amount of people to make certain that nothing is lost or not checked in. So you still do the work. After the machine has done its work you still need to take the material and check them. I guess we don't ever have to worry about losing our jobs because of that.

It's a little more stressful, in a sense, because you've got a lot of little things that happen with the new mechanized equipment. When it breaks down you have to change your method of working, because it's a machine that breaks down, and then you have to do it all manually in a different manner to do the same work. I don't know if everyone feels it's been an improvement, but we have to deal with it. This is what we have. I did read a book and I can't remember the title of it, but someone wrote a book that indicated that Edmonton Public Library is actually a guinea pig for the rest of the library systems.

Whatever we start, they wait and see the process that we go through before they initiate it.

Q: What's the attitude of library staff towards their union?

MH: The library staff that we have presently have ended up being a lot of younger people. The older staff, the staff that has been there for some time, recognize that their union has gotten them their benefits, their working hours, that sort of thing. They work within the union philosophy. They're the ones that are really quite behind the union. But I've found that the younger staff, not understanding and being aware of what unions got them, are the ones that will say, well my boss will give me that amount of money if I just do the work. We'll say to them, no, you're getting that amount of money because it was a negotiated item and this is what you are being paid, making it fair. Well I don't care if I have to put in a couple of extra hours, I'll still get such and such. They don't understand that in a sense they are eroding what unions are actually there for.

It's unfortunate, because you try to tell these young people, if you do this and you keep doing this, the management is going to expect you to do it and you're not going to get paid for your efforts beyond what you are actually supposed to be doing. My feeling is that we have to teach a lot of younger people how and why they're under a union contract, what unions got for them in the beginning, what unions can offer them eventually as time goes on; that they can make their workplace better, that actually they are being kept in a safety net because of a union. They have their grievance rights and everything else, otherwise they'd be like any other retail sector, if you're not under a union, you do something and you're turfed. At least here you can say something and have some backup. I just feel badly that I have never come up with an answer as to how can we introduce this to the younger people and make them understand, short of having the big rallies, the big thing, like when unions started out.

Q: They have to know what it was like back then.

MH: Yes, in order to realize that a lot of people went through a lot to get what they now enjoy. For some reason it's really difficult to show them that. I think the younger generation, and I'm talking about the people that are younger than 30s, because they've enjoy their parents having a better lifestyle and they don't see the conflicts that they went through to get what they are enjoying now. The children, okay I'll go get a job, I'm getting paid so much. There are still lower paid jobs but I think the families have been better off.

Q: You know what it was like to come from tough times.

MH: I know what it was like to be here when we came. We came in October, it was cold. We had nowhere to go. My father did not have a house. We tried to live with my uncle, which didn't work out. He got angry with my dad. The only two brothers in Canada, and he got angry with my dad. We actually slept the first night in a haystack here in Canada. All we had to cover with was the coats we had on. Dad made a big hole in a haystack, we

climbed in there, and that was where we slept that night. In Breton. And we walked five miles to town the next morning to the hotel.

Dad had been brought to Canada under contract with CPR. When he left Winnipeg and came here when we came, apparently he hadn't finished fulfilling his contract. Even though he was making shoes for Eaton's that was fine, but he hadn't fulfilled the contract with CPR. So when we got to the hotel we had no money and the people who owned the hotel were nice enough to feed us and give us a room to stay in for two or three nights.

In the meantime, the fellow from CPR happened to come here to Breton and found dad and said, "Look, you either have to come back or you have to pay the rest of your fee for being brought here." He didn't have any money for that. My dad had been sending money to his brother, my uncle, thinking that my uncle would repay him. When the time came, it didn't happen. So dad went down into the bar, couldn't speak English hardly at all. He went into the bar and auctioned off his watch. The highest bidder got his watch, so we had a few bucks. Dad gave it to him and said, "This is all I can give you." The guy said, "You know what, your contract's paid for." He took it and left. It wasn't very much money, but the guy realized, he's here with a family now. I'm not going to bug him. It was tough.

If it wouldn't have been for a distant cousin in Breton who had a farm with a house and a barn and some cattle – they lived in town all winter so they allowed us to stay in the house. Mom looked after the cattle and we were allowed to live there for that. Dad went to work building roadways all winter long. My mom did the best she could with whatever groceries we had. I remember one time she actually took the rifle and went to try and shoot some partridges off the roof. She didn't really know how to use a rifle but she did manage to knock a couple of them down and made soup out of them for our meal. When we came there was no handouts, there wasn't anybody to look after the refugees. There was nothing.

Dad left his hometown and went to Germany. There he ended up being an overseer in one of the compounds where all the workers lived. I think the reason he got that position was because he learnt German quickly, he made a point of learning it. He wasn't absolutely fluent in it, but enough that he could get by. He was there for a couple of years living in this compound. My mom got taken from the same home town that my dad lived in, they lived in the same village. One day the army guys just came, two officers came in and told her to grab whatever she had. She didn't even get a chance to pack anything. They took her from there and took her to Germany. They had put her on a train from Germany to somewhere further south. She was going to a factory that made munitions. Everyone knew that if you went to this munitions factory you were pretty certain that you wouldn't come back.

Q: So she was essentially a slave laborer?

MH: Yes. They were all just taken in and none of them could say no. They had no choice. It so happened that she had worked in another one for a short period of time and

then they took her from that compound. I don't know what she was doing right from the beginning. It might've been cigars at that point; wrapping big cigars. They were taking her to this other place. My dad was not married to her at that time; they were not together. He learned that she was being taken there. He went to his officer and told him that that was his wife, that he needed her back. Some kind of deal he made with one of the German officers and they did bring her back.

They managed to get her back to Augsburg. Then she worked in a tobacco factory where they made cigars. She said it was long hours. You stood there and you just rolled and rolled tobacco all day long. You got fed turnip soup. Her and dad got together, she ended up getting pregnant, and she said she was allowed a little more turnip soup because she was pregnant with me. Actually, though, the one thing she said they did do is, even though the Ukrainians were like slave labor, they were treated a little better than the Polish. She said the Ukrainians were getting better treatment than the Polish, which was interesting. Dad had pictures and they saw a lot during that time, of the murdering of the Jews. And it wasn't just the Jews, it was anyone that had any good education – professors, nurses, you name it, they were all destroyed. What the Germans, I believe, were afraid of is that if you were too well educated you could cause an uprising. But if you didn't know anything, you were less likely to create a problem for them. They killed a lot of people that weren't just Jews, so there was a lot of them. Dad said, “You'd hear the guns. You could hear the rifle shots, and you never were sure where you stood at any point in time.”

Q: When did they make the decision to immigrate to Canada?

MH: Actually, we ended up being displaced, in a sense. There was really nothing to go home to in the Ukraine after the war. They were still working in Germany for a while. Dad actually started a shoemaker shop, but we weren't German citizens. I was actually a German citizen through birth. Mom and dad found that they had nothing to go back to in the Ukraine to start anything. Germany eventually didn't want these people there either. Anybody that was displaced in those years was allowed to leave, and you had the choice of going to Brazil, Australia or Canada. Dad chose Canada. He left first. CPR brought him over and paid for his fare. I think mom and I came almost two years later if not more. It would've been about two years later that we came.

Q: Who paid your and your mother's fare?

MH: I believe dad sent money back to Germany to bring us. For the longest time, mom wasn't going to come. She was just going to stay there. She had planned not to be here but he kept sending telegrams, sending telegrams, and finally there was enough money to pay for our way. We came. We were still displaced; we really had nowhere. It was either stay there and try and make a life, but you really didn't belong there, and they called us all DPs at that time. So we came to Canada.

I can remember a little bit of Germany and after the war, well this is a little incident that happened when I was probably two or three, when I just started speaking. I spoke German from the beginning, and Ukrainian with my parents. Right after the war, you

didn't have money for food. You had coupons. So you were still rationed; we got so much for food. At one point my mom sent me to the store – I must've been three – to get some butter. The store was just down the block a little bit. I took this coupon and went to get the butter, got the butter, came home, sat on the porch, and I must have been craving salt or something because my mom and I both ended up with goiters. They went away later, but at that point in time I must have been craving salt, because I sat there with this pound of butter. I took a little taste, it wasn't so bad, and another little taste. By the time my mom came to look to see where I was, the butter wasn't there and I had eaten it almost all. The nice part that my mom was pretty levelheaded and she understood, she didn't give me heck.

Just to back up a bit, neither one of my parents, my mother actually never went to school. The village that she was born in, she didn't have a father. My grandmother married shortly after, when my mother was about six or seven, and had another family. There was no room for mom; there was no place for her to be. So she ended up having to work for people from that time on, looking after other people's homes. She was sent to work. There was nowhere else for her to live.

Q: Regarding the union, what's the relevance of being independent?

MH: We're proud of being an independent union because we manage everything here ourselves. We don't wait for someone from Ontario or some other part of the country to tell us how to manage our money, where it should be put, who we should look after. We look after the city of Edmonton and now EPCOR in Calgary. We look after our members here. So everything we collect and do is for the members here. We don't take orders from anyone else, and for us that's good. When we were part of CUPE way back when, when they had a strike, money wasn't being given to us for the people here that were on strike, because someone there made the decision that it wasn't really needed.

I was not here during that time, I was not within the union, but this was my understanding as to why we broke away. For me and I'm sure a lot of others, we can deal with the issues that arise here better because we are here to see these issues, we are here to know what's going on, and we can look after our people better. Large unions have more money, they can do other things. But I think when you keep it a little smaller, a little more compact, you've got your pulse on what is happening within your union more so than you do when you're being headed by someone else somewhere else. You know what's happening here today. That's the best part of being an independent union. I understand that there are others now that are taking some of the way we do things. They're thinking, well hey, those guys are doing really well that way, maybe we will change something in order to be able to do that. I'm not aware if there are any other real independent unions within Alberta.

Q: Talk about the things your union contributes in the community.

MH: Because we are independent, we have our board of directors or executive board, and the members have the choice of saying yea or nay to whatever the board decides they

want to have done. So when we support our members through our community support committee, for instance, when they get lost between the cracks through, let's say illness, and the insurance company isn't paying them, then we're there to help them out. Of course our shop stewards have to let us know who these people are and we help them out. We do donate a lot of money to the community, to all these smaller charities and the hospitals, the Stollery, we donate a lot of money to them.

As 52 evolved it always has had its charitable organization. It's always given away donations to certain things. We try to look after our members the best we can. I know of some that have had to come back a couple of times in order to get help, because they just haven't been able to manage. The worst part is it's more a lot of single mothers that seem to either fall between the cracks and have no one else to help them out. They need the help. We determine through our community support committee, we do interviews and decide on how much help is required, what we can do for them. We don't just arbitrarily hand out cash. We make sure things are paid for them, that they have food. There we also have a committee that determines that. The members get an update all the time. They're always having an update as to what's happening. It is much easier for us as a whole to keep our members advised of what's going on.

Q: Has your union supported any other union during strikes?

MH: We supported the Shaw strike. I can't remember if we supported them monetarily or whether we supported them just as another union would support. The biggest thing since Marion's time is we actually created the Coalition. The Coalition is the firefighters, the transit union, CUPE outside workers, local 30, ourselves, and UFCW 401. Because of the coalition we're able to have a little more leeway and clout when it comes to our contract negotiations. Whenever one of the unions is having a problem as far as having to strike or whatever, the coalition can back that and say, if this happens with this union then this is what's going to happen with the others. We have strength in numbers.

So the Coalition has actually been a good thing. I believe now that because of what we've started in Edmonton I think they're trying to do that in Calgary. It takes years but eventually people see the possibility of it being a benefit to them, so they continue with that. At this point I don't remember a lot of how many unions we have helped in the past. But once again I'd like to say that we actually do take care of our own people here. Even some of the younger ones that we have helped, I've now noticed that they've needed the help and they realize that the union does back them up. It's unfortunate that they have to be in need to understand that, but then it gets passed on.

[END]