

Angela Fiddler

March 10, 2015 Fort McMurray Interviewers: Winston Gereluk & Don Bouzek

AF: I come from the Waterhen Cree Nation, which is in northern Saskatchewan right up by Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan.

Q: What is your occupation, your union, and your role in the union?

AF: I'm with Local 401 UFCW. I've been enrolled in camp and been with the union since day one, which was October 6, 2010.

Q: What do you do in the camp?

AF: I'm a housekeeper. My title is a housekeeper, although I did start off in the kitchen when I applied and got the position. But I had a little bit of rough time in the kitchen and I decided I needed a little bit of a change.

Q: How long ago was that?

AF: When I first started I was in the kitchen. I think it was about 10 or 11 months and then I said, this isn't for me, so can I move into housekeeping?

Q: Can you tell us why?

AF: When I first came into camp, it was different. It's the first time I'd ever worked in a camp setting. But, at the same time, a lot of people say it's like jail when they go out there and things, but to me it's not jail. There are some rules to it, but I was kind of used to that because I did attend residential school back in the day '89, '90. So it was sort of like I was going back to residential school. I came into a position at camp where it was kind of like residential school where you leave from home and then you're out there and you're working. Instead of me going to school I was going to work and getting paid for it. Then after work I would try and keep myself busy so I wouldn't be lonely. You get used to it but sometimes it hurts. I'm still here.

Q: What sort of rough time did you have in the kitchen?

AF: Well I thought that I would be cooking. I thought that maybe I would get all this hands-on skills and everything. I was hired as a kitchen worker. I was doing some catering before I got this camp job. I was making soup and bannock for the chief and council when they had their meetings or any other little events like that. I did some fundraising that way, catering to the tribal council and things. So I thought that I would be getting into that and getting more experience and thinking, "Well one of these days I'm going to be head cook or something or a chef." But I was just a kitchen helper and for a long time I was stuck in the dish pit, which they call the dish pit, like just doing dishes. I couldn't take the schedule. It was from 4 p.m. till I think it was 2:30 a.m. or something like that. I just couldn't handle an evening and then staying up until 7 in the morning and then sleeping. I just couldn't handle that; that wasn't for me. So that was kind of one of the issues that I had.

Then I had said I finally had enough of it, and it was like every month was like, am I going to survive? Am I going to survive this turnaround at camp? I'm going to quit. I kept

thinking that and I kept forcing myself every day. Okay, you can do this, you can get through this, another workday. Your kids need the money, we need to survive, you can do this. So I got really tired of being in the dish pit and I didn't see an opportunity to even sort of like go to the other parts of the kitchen or anything. I wasn't given that opportunity. I wanted to get out of the dish pit and I thought, well why am I in here? I've been in here for months while we have new people coming in and they're getting to pick wherever they went. So why am I the one that has to stay in the dish pit? Because I'm not complaining, is that what it is? I didn't want to complain because I was so grateful for that opportunity to work out at camp. But I can't always do the same job over and over and over, so I said, you know what, I need out of this.

I didn't see any opportunity and this one night I just had it. I remember I was getting mad and I said, if they put me in this dish pit one more time I quit. So I don't know who heard me but I just had it; that was it. That was the night that I just said, that's it, I'm going to quit. I deserve better and I'm not always going to be in here and they can find somebody else. That's it, I quit. So the next day I came back into work again, because you convince yourself every day, okay get up, c'mon, you can do this. So then I went in and the chef pulled me aside and said, so I heard you don't like the dish pit. I said, no. I said, and if you put me in here one more time, I said, I quit. Simple as that. I said, I'm not taking this anymore. Then he was really nice to me though. He goes, okay, well let's see what we can put you in.

So he put me in the dining room, which I liked better because I like socializing. When you're in the dish pit, you don't get to talk to anybody, you don't see anybody. You're just doing your work and it's so boring. All you do is think. It's horrible being in there. Sometimes the company will put people in that position to punish them. They'll put you in the dish pit if they don't like--if you have some sort of trouble out in the dining room or anything like that, they'll put you in the dish pit. So we seen that as a form of punishment. So that's why I was like, why am I always in there? So he agreed. He got me out of there, he put me in dining room for a while. But then I noticed that we had one supervisor that wasn't, at first I really liked her because she was an elderly person, and in my culture we respect our elders. So anything she told me to do, I did it, because I didn't want to disrespect her. We started having a little bit of trouble where she was getting me to do a lot of work while she didn't do anything. I didn't want to disrespect her but at the same time I had a hard time trying to clean that whole dining room by myself. So I said, well you know, we have to, you know, I can only do this or that.

So I started doing the tables. We had to wipe everything down – sides, top, every little piece of anything that was on there, the saltshakers, whatever. We had to wipe everything down and that's what I did, like disinfect it. So when I was almost done the tables she had said, well now you got to do this. I said, I won't have time for that. I still have to finish this and then I got to do the floors and I got to ... She got mad at me. I said, I can't. Either/ or; you need to tell me what I have to do. I can't do this whole job. So then I went in the back and she said, well go and do whatever. So I said, well, okay, well I'm just going to go and get the mop water then, I said. So I went to the mop station and she followed me. Because we work late at night it was probably about 11 p.m. so there was

barely anybody in the kitchen at that time. She followed me to the mop station and she was getting mad at me. She said, well fuck off then. I said, you can't swear at me just because nobody was around. I said, I'm going to report you. I said, you're not allowed to be treating me like this. Then I had two co-workers walk by at that same time, so they heard her. She denied it, but I went straight to HR and that's when I started understanding what a union was about. I didn't really know.

Q: You had a union in the plant at that time?

AF: Yes we did, but I didn't really understand what a union was for or the rights we had. So I went to HR and wrote her up, because I wouldn't allow anybody to treat me like that. So there was a big investigation and I don't know what happened, but I said, I do not want to work, I can't work with her. I said, that relationship is gone already and I don't feel comfortable. So is there a way to just let me go, let me go to housekeeping? So we waited for that opportunity and that's when I got to go into housekeeping.

Q: Tell us about your background and early influences.

AF: My parents come from two different reserves. My mother is from Flying Dust First Nation and my dad is from Waterhen Lake First Nation. So they met through my grandpa or some other thing, somehow like that, so I was born. I was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, but I lived in Flying Dust when I was a baby. Then we were transferred over to Waterhen, so I lived both in Flying Dust and in Waterhen, both reserves. I also lived in town, which is Meadow Lake. I've actually lived quite a bit of places. I lived in Saskatoon, the big city of Saskatoon, while my mother was going to university and my dad was going to university in Regina. But we didn't move to Regina; we were just in Saskatoon. Then my mom would be done her year of ITAP and we'd go move back to the reserve, so I was always back and forth. I wasn't really accepted in let's say the white society in the city of Saskatoon, because there wasn't very many First Nations people out there. I was the only one most of the time, one or two of us First Nation children within the school. So it was kind of hard growing up in the city, and you're kind of more accepted when you're back home with your own people. But at the same time it was different also because my parents didn't drink, they didn't smoke, they didn't do drugs or anything. They always worked. So I kind of had that upper hand to things. I was not very well off but I was a little bit more well off than most other people. But I've always had a heart; I've always shared whatever I've had, things growing up like that on the reserve. It's hard, and it is hard to see people even now. I am blessed and my kids are blessed right now because I'm working. So that's just part of I guess where I am today is because my parents worked and my parents didn't have these problems. They broke out of that residential school syndrome, I guess what you would say.

Q: What is that syndrome?

AF: The syndrome is, you know, when your parents, my dad was taken away when he was small, so he went through that. But when he came out he learned to forgive and kind of get through that and realize that there's a world out there. Then he began to, I guess

heal himself, but he had help. He had my grandpa, which is my mom's dad, kind of counselling him spiritually so where he was able to forgive and work on himself. My mom didn't go to residential school but she did go to a boarding school. But I think residential schools are even--it's hard to be taken away.

Q: Did you go to residential school?

AF: Yes, I did. But when I went, there wasn't any nuns or any priests there. But when my dad went, there was.

Q: So your experience was more pleasant?

AF: Yes, it was. Yes, there wasn't any abuses there by the time I went. There was no abuse taken on. I didn't have to worry about getting sexually or physically abused or anything. But it's kind of the same too because you're leaving from your home and you're going far away. When I was going to residential school we were there for about two weeks I guess, two to three weeks, and then we were allowed to come home for the weekend. So then I would go home back to my community and then go back again. I kind of had a hard time too. I quit school a few times when I was in grade 12 because I didn't want to be there. But I wanted to finish my schooling, but yet it was hard to be so far away. Then you have your, we had our differences. There was only First Nations people there that went to school there—well, Métis too, but we had our two different tribes, which was the Crees and then you had the Denes. A lot of times we didn't get along, so there was always that, there were arguments, things like that. But, as you grow up, you learn to forgive and then you also realize that what were we fighting for in the first place? But all of those come into play and I'm sure that all of us were going through hard times being there out at the residential school and not being able to go home because if you want an education, that's your option. There's no high schools in First Nations, I mean they don't have funding for that, so there's absolutely no way you're going to get a high school. So, that's what we did; we just went to the residential school.

Q: Which was where?

AF: Beauval, Saskatchewan. That's north...

Q: North of Meadow Lake?

AF: Yes. It was, I think, about four hours away from Meadow Lake, up past Green Lake.

Q: So you graduated with grade 12?

AF: Yes, I graduated there.

Q: Were you allowed to speak your language or keep any of your traditional beliefs by that time?

AF: We were allowed to, but by then we'd lost our language. I didn't grow up speaking my language. My dad does, but I don't, my children don't, my mother doesn't. But I can still kind of understand it when they talk, but we weren't taught it. I think it was because they were already taught as a child that they weren't allowed to speak it, so I'm thinking that they decided maybe it's not a good thing to teach our children, because we don't want them to go through what we went through.

Q: What are conditions like on your home reserve now? Do you visit once in a while?

AF: Yes, once in a while. I still have a place out in Waterhen Lake First Nation but I barely get to go home because of my work schedule. My kids live in Saskatoon and Prince Albert, so I rarely get to go home even though I want to. I want to be there on days off because it's beautiful out there and it's quiet. It's just peaceful, where my house is anyways. It's a little part of Waterhen. It's called Beaver River, and there's only four houses on that little part. So I just live down the road from my parents, and then my uncle's place and then other neighbours. So there's only four of us out there, so that's my house, that's my home. I love it there.

Q: How are the people doing there?

AF: They're doing good. But on the main reserve there's a lot of, it's okay, but still I see there's a lot of problems there because it's further up north and it's remote community. There's bush, we're in the bush, so there's not a lot of job opportunities out there at all whatsoever. It just seems it's really hard to break out of that cycle. After I graduated, I went back to my parents' place but it's like I didn't see there's a whole world out there, that I could do anything I wanted to do, go anywhere I wanted to. I didn't see it myself. Maybe I didn't believe it or I didn't have a goal or plan or nothing. I think a lot of our people are like that; they don't see that they can just get up and do it. It takes a lot of hard work though. I started having children when I was young. I had my first one when I was 18 years old and then I had another one shortly after that. So I was on welfare. I actually have six kids now. At the time my mom was telling me, no, you shouldn't be having so much kids; it's going to be hard. I didn't see that and I didn't realize how hard it was going to be because I didn't have a plan for my life and I didn't realize. I think it's just the mentality that we have growing up and seeing nothing on the reserve. You don't see any job opportunities really unless you're a teacher aide. At one point I was a teacher aide at the school too. But it's that lifestyle, I think also, when you live on the reserve, there's nothing to do. There's nothing to do out there, so that's how people start getting into trouble. Then they get into their addictions and they don't see any way out. I kind of fell into that also. Never did drugs but it was the drinking. That was our social life. What else is there to do? There's no jobs. I couldn't survive living in the city going to work with my small ones at home. How was I going to pay the babysitter and all of these other bills and expenses that I had to come up with? I tried it once. I tried working at Kentucky Fried Chicken in Meadow Lake. I lasted, I think, a month but I ended up getting fired. She told me, well, we're going to have to let you go. I said, thank goodness, because I can't handle this anymore. So I just gave back my uniforms and that was that. It was like, that was something. I was just thankful. It was crazy. But I told her, and I also had a sense of kind

of like management skills too. I was telling her, you shouldn't even be doing things like this. This is how you have to run it and everything. But it's like they don't understand things like that. They just put you in positions and they expect you to do that job, and they don't know how. They know how it's run but they haven't done the work. So it's hard on a person. They know that you need to correct certain procedures and everything like that, so when managers come up with their plans of how to get a job done, it's like, are you crazy? You need to come out and do that job for a month and then you'll realize.

Q: So what did you do after that?

AF: After that I actually took some classes. I was taking business, business administration.

Q: From whom?

AF: From the regional college. I had taken some televised classes. I wanted to get my education but it was very hard because I was a single mother at the time and my kids were young. Also, when I was in that state of mind, I knew what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to get an education, but at the same time having children is a lot of responsibility, so much responsibility. I felt like all week I was just weighed down with doing this, doing that, making sure my kids are fed, making sure I had enough food, things like this. Then, by the weekend, it was like, I want to have fun. So I was kind of into that where all week would be good but come the weekend I'm going to go out. I kinda fell into that, but it didn't do me any good at all because I wasn't getting anywhere. I just needed a change and I needed to get out of that economic slump that I was in. It was poverty is what it was. At the time you're trying to work and you're only getting minimum wage, which I think was \$6.50 at the time. It was like, are you crazy, how am I supposed to pay all these bills? There's no way. So the only way I figured was welfare pays for my bills; at least my kids are getting fed. Do a little bit of work here and a little bit of work there to cover what I need to do. If I need extra money I'll go and cater one meal, which is \$60. Okay great, now I have milk and bread and whatever. So that's what I started doing.

Then I was thinking, I need a good paying job. I have six kids. The only way I'm going to be able to survive, pay my bills, make sure my kids are fed, and make sure they have food and clothing and everything is I need a good paying job. I remember that one night I was praying and I was like, okay God, I need a job in Fort McMurray; I heard that they have really good pay there. So that was it, and I never thought about that. Well I think every once in a while, geez if only I was working there. So that's how I guess basically it started where I started thinking, yes, maybe I should; I wonder if I could get in. So I took a course. I took a kitchen worker course through the regional college. It was a three month program to get me ready for a camp life or a camp job. So that's what I did. Then again it didn't happen right away but I was back on welfare again sitting around waiting for this opportunity, waiting for a change in life, something, anything. So I was out at my grandparents' and it was my grandma that actually had told me that they were having PTI out at the gym in Flying Dust First Nation, and they were taking applications and

explaining everything about camp life and camp jobs, anything that you could be out there, and all these great opportunities, and everything like that.

My grandma's says like, c'mon, we're going to go get you a job; we're taking you right now; let's go. I'm like, but grandma look, I didn't even do my hair or anything. Never mind. She's like that, right. She's like, let's go. She drives me straight to the gym and I'm still sitting in the car because I still wasn't sure. She's the one that said, okay, let's go, get off, and she takes me right in. When I got into the gym there was lots of people in there and they're applying for these different positions and everything. I thought, well okay. It was just the ending, I had missed everything, but at least they still had the forms out there and everything. So I quickly filled out a form and I took it in, and they called me. They said, I want you to come for an interview. I was like, okay. I was so excited. I remember that day when I was waiting in the tribal council and sitting there, I just had butterflies. I just couldn't believe I'm going for this job interview. Wow, all these things. It was like the opportunity of a lifetime. So, when I got into the interview, they had a big table and they had a few of them around the table. I was so scared I didn't know what to say or what to do. They just made me feel comfortable. We were just talking, laughing, and joking around and just talking normally and I didn't even realize. So I was waiting a couple of days; I wonder if I got it. Then they called me and said, you made the cut; come for an orientation and things like that. So I went in again and I remember just sitting there, wow, like I'm going to go work in Fort McMurray. It was a blessing is what it was. It was a blessing I needed to in order to feed my kids and everything. I needed this job. So it was good, it was good.

Q: And that was four and a half years ago.

AF: Yes, four and a half years ago.

Q: What were your impressions when you first arrived at camp?

AF: The way I am I just accept change; change is always a good thing. So, when I got there, we had to go and do our drug test. No, we actually did one of the drug tests here in Fort McMurray, because I remember we had to camp the night here. No, actually they had said, you can't do your drug test here, you have to go and do it at camp. I remember everybody needed to use the washroom, like we were just drinking water like crazy getting ready to do our pee test. Then they said, well you have to go all the way to camp now and go and do it. It was like, oh my goodness, you wouldn't believe everybody. They're like, hurry up. Everybody needed to use the bathroom. I remember I was like second in line because I'm just like, no I'm going next. So I went and did it and everybody was just relieved once they got to camp. Why would they make us wait an extra two hours? Then we went and got lost on our way to camp and we went around Syncrude that circle again and then we finally found our way. It was like horrible; it was torture. So once we got there we did it and everything was clean and it was like wow. So then they showed us we got our rooms. I remember going in my room and I was thinking, wow I'm out here, this is going to be a piece of cake. I can work. But it was a different story.

Q: Who was taking care of your kids?

AF: Well when I first got hired, my ex, I was telling him, well you know, I'm going to get a camp job and I was wondering if you could keep the kids. He's like, you're not f'in going out there. That was it. I didn't talk to him after that. So my oldest girl was 18 at the time, so I told her, okay, this is the play. I said, mom needs a job. This is a good paying job and I can't give it up. So we kind of like had a family meeting. Okay, this is what you're going to do, this is what you kids are responsible for – cooking, cleaning. My oldest girl, you got to make sure that the kids get to school. She kind of took over that role, because there was no choice. My mom said she would come in, because she lived on the reserve and I lived in the city of Meadow Lake at the time. So she said, okay you got the job, I'll go in there and check on the kids. My grandma said, good, you need to be out there working and I'll go there and help too and check on them.

So that's what they did for the first couple weeks until my ex found out that I was out at Fort McMurray. I had a hard time; I almost quit. It was kind of like I was sort of in a really bad relationship. It was emotional, mental abuse, not physical or anything like that. But it was like, that's your job, you're a mother and you stay home with your kids. It was that way. I said, no. I said, someone needs to feed the kids here. I'm not going to be on welfare anymore and this is what I'm going to do whether you like it or not. He didn't like it but he ended up going to pick up the kids and then he took them home with him to North Battleford. Right in the beginning it was so hard as a single mother, and coming out of a relationship like that, it was very hard. I had to force myself to keep going and not to give up because I thought, no, this is for my kids, I'm doing this for my kids. So as time went by, he began to realize that this was a good thing, me working. He began to realize that the kids are okay and things. So it took that, and I say that's a blessing because he's a wonderful dad today. At the time he wasn't very involved with the kids but today he's a wonderful, wonderful parent. I'm just happy for that opportunity, because I feel safe that my kids are safe with him. He takes really good care of them. He doesn't drink or do drugs or gamble or anything. He's into his sports and everything, so I have no worries. All I have to do is send money for them to make sure they have a full fridge, the clothes, hockey equipment, soccer equipment, everything like that.

They're all involved in sports. One of my sons is actually going to the U.S. Soccer Cup in July, so he's on a team. He's on the Native Sons team, so that takes money. All these blessings. Then the dad, he's also, he sees it as a blessing too. So it all worked out in the end but in the beginning it was very rocky. But now it's really good. I've grown so much ever since I started work out here too--emotionally, mentally. Even physically I lost some weight even though, but I'm more in shape and everything and I do a lot of extracurricular activities too at work. I'm a very social person so I can't just go to my room and just sit there and be lonely. No, I'll go out and if I'm feeling lonely I go out and grab somebody and say, hey let's go play pool, let's go grab a coffee, things like that. So that's where I am today. I don't play pool as much though anymore because all the guys know I'm a shark and I think they don't like being beat by a woman.

Q: So you have a good relationship with people in the camp.

AF: Yes, I have a very good working relationship.

Q: No sexism, no racism, no discrimination, because you're an Aboriginal woman?

AF: There were a few racist people there, but I think they knew that I was the type of person that wouldn't put up with it, so they were very careful what they'd say to me. But I did have a few people making comments right to my face like saying that all Aboriginal people, all the First Nations people, should be paying for their own drug tests.

Q: Hold it, is somebody coming in? . . . Okay, repeat that sentence. . .

AF: Yes, that they should be paying for their own drug test because we fail them all, and that we all need to go and take a fitness test before we can come out to camp and work. The kind of person I am, I'm very forgiving. So I just kind of let it, I said, okay, like of let it go. I was thinking about it, it took about a month, and it was starting to bother me. I was thinking, why would they say that? Then I thought management said it. So I confronted her and I said, you remember that statement you said to me? She goes, oh yes. I said, well I want to know what manager said that, because that's wrong. I said, that's profiling. She's like, oh no, no management said that; that was my idea. But you know what, no. I was just looking at her like I didn't understand her why she would say that, especially she was in kind of like a higher position than me, and for her to say that to me. But I just let it go. I just thought, well she says she's sorry or whatever; so I just thought, oh okay. Well she'll see, I thought. So that's how a lot of, I started getting involved with the union and realizing that I had rights as an Aboriginal person. First of all, I don't like saying Aboriginal because that's a political term.

Q: What is the term you use?

AF: First Nations. So, as a First Nations person, I started realizing that I had rights within the workplace and things. I'm actually chair of the Indigenous Committee out at the Civeo camps out here, BMC camps. How we got started was I started seeing that there was a few of us that were being mistreated at camp. There was only a few of us in the beginning but even for that supervisor to swear at me I was thinking, that's not right. She doesn't treat anybody else like that. Why does she think she can treat me like this? So I started talking with one of my coworkers, Daryl, and I had asked him, how are you guys being treated? How are you being treated, and who's First Nation? So he was telling me some stories and I was saying, well you know what, this isn't right. How come there's no opportunity for us to become managers or supervisors? We have the skills for this. We can learn or take classes, we can be in management one of these days. When they came out, when PTI had come out to Flying Dust they also gave us an orientation that said, you can take your Red Seal through us, you can become chef, you can become a head housekeeper. Take some classes, get that experience, get out there and you're going to do so well. So that's why I thought, hey I'm going to become a chef, I'm going to work my way up. I'm going to learn, I'm going to do this. But there wasn't that opportunity and

there still isn't really that opportunity here. But I've been working on it. I did go into HR and I had asked them, this was about three years back, and I had asked them for that opportunity. I said that I wanted to be in HR because I do have some of my business administration but I didn't have my full degree. But I would like that training, and I heard that you have training for us and that we could take classes. She says to me, oh no, nope, you're always going to be a housekeeper. I said, well what about kitchen? She said, no, there's no opportunity here. I said, oh okay, well I just thought that. So that's why I left and that was it, and that's why I needed that change too in housekeeping. It was kind of getting out of the kitchen and getting out of where you bump heads with people. When you don't have the right people in management, it really affects your employees.

Q: So this person was in HR who said that to you?

AF: Yes.

Q: I wonder where she took her training.

AF: Yes. So I didn't really think too much of it after that. I just thought, okay. So now I was back to, can I survive? I'm not getting anywhere. Is it worth it to work out here and not have my kids, for the money? Or is there a way that I can actually love my job and not only just do the housework, which I consider slave work. I say it's slave work because it is so hard on you and there's so much of a quota. They say there's no quota, but they still give you a lot of that. It's like they overload you with work and everything and they don't hire the right amount of people, so sometimes I say it's slave work. I do want to do a good job and I want to make sure that all my rooms are done, so I try not to hand any in because I don't want to look like the bad employee.

As a First Nations person I saw right in the beginning I was making sure that I did everything perfect because we already have that stereotype as a drunken Indian, dirty Indian. I even had one of my coworkers say that to me – when all you Indians come, we thought, oh boy now the camp is going down, we're going to have a dirty place, this is disgusting. So I just listened. I was like, oh my gosh, she's really saying this to me? I'm not the type of person to fly off the wall, so I just listened. Well you know, I said, we work harder than a lot of the employees here, I said, because we already have that stereotype on us. So we were making sure, there were a few of us, we were making sure we had everything sparkling because we already had that stereotype of being a dirty Indian. I didn't want that. I would be embarrassed if anybody came into my rooms where I was cleaning and they would say, look at this Indian, does not even clean right. So I made sure that I slaved to make sure that it was perfect and you could eat off the floors; that's how clean it was. Until I got hurt, because I was overworking myself. But we still have that. That's still happening at camp where we know that that's what they're going to say if they find something wrong in our rooms.

Q: It's happening in society, that's why.

AF: Yes. So when I had HR say that to me, I was like, okay well I'll just do what I can here, and when I get tired of this, I guess I'll just go back and try and find another job. But no one's going to pay as good as they do at camp. So you learn to survive, you just learn to let things go, things that you can't change. If these people think that, oh well. It's not true but what can you do to change their mind? They were raised that way.

Q: Doesn't the company have a strict policy of zero tolerance for racist or sexist behaviour?

AF: Yes, but at the time it didn't dawn on me. Plus I didn't want to get anybody in trouble because I didn't want them to lose their jobs or anything like that. I often thought about things like that. I could go and tell on them, but at the same time they need to work too. But at the same time the way I am I'm a forgiving person, so I'll just let it go for now. I think sort of as a First Nations person, the way we were raised, we don't say much. A lot of times, we won't say what's bothering us; we won't say what happened to us or what those people said to us. Then we just end up quitting; we just quit instead of having to cause waves in any work situation or anything like that. We'll just give up without saying anything.

So that's where the union comes into play with me. I started realizing that this was happening to our First Nations people out at camp and I said, enough is enough. So I was talking to my coworker and I said, you know what, we have to do something. I said, I don't know what we can do. I said, we should form a committee. He's like, yes we should eh. I'm like, yes. So we talked about it. Nothing was really done for a while. Then we kind of just, when we'd meet up or we had different shifts and everything, we'd meet up and talk a little bit again. But nothing was really, we didn't really get things going until they changed the policy at work, which was you can't have any flammable material in your room or you can't light candles; you can't have like matches. I guess if you have matches in there, well as long as they're not lit or things like that. So my coworker couldn't practice his spirituality anymore because he used to smudge in his room with sweetgrass and everything. So they, instead of talking with him, they just wrote him up and they said, if you do this one more time you're fired, you're terminated. He said, that's a human right and you can't do that. They didn't even give a warning or nothing; they just gave him a letter and said, you are going to be terminated if you do this one more time. He said, that's a human right. Try it, he said. I am still going to practise my spirituality and you're never going to stop me. The thing with that is because we're starting to actually rise up as First Nation people, we're not going to let anybody tell us that we can't practise our spirituality anymore or we're not allowed to practice our culture or speak our language or anything like that. We're not going to allow them to do that, because that's our right. That's the way we were born, and if God didn't want us to be like that, then he would've have made us like this. So that's what we did. When he said that I was like, okay I said, this is what we're going to do. I said, we're going to form a committee and we're going to see who else is having these problems. So we began reaching out. I began documenting everything, everyone I talked to, everything that was going on. I also made steps in saying, the only way I can do anything is if I become a stop steward. Sorry, my phone. . .

Q: How hard is it to be away from your children?

AF: It's very hard to be away from my children. I'm not sure if it's the way we're brought up, but we're very close knit in the community on our reserves. We all know each other. We're very close knit that even elders that we're not related to or anybody that passes away in the reserve, the whole reserve will show up and help and participate in the wake and the funeral and things like that. So being away from my kids is even more harder, and my family. But you have to keep telling yourself that you're doing this for your children. You're not only doing this for your children but you're also helping them to understand how important it is to work and to break that cycle of residential school syndrome. Once you come out of residential school you're taken away from when you're a child and then you're let go when you're 18. So how are you supposed to learn how to be a mother? How are you supposed to learn how to love one another when you can't even, when you look across the room and you see your sister sitting on the girls' side and you're not even allowed to talk to them? But you don't understand because it's the nuns and the priests that are telling you you're not allowed to talk to the girls or you're not allowed to talk to the boys. So you don't understand that and you're not allowed to speak your language or do anything that you were doing previously with your parents before you got taken away, stolen away. Not just taken, but stolen. My grandpa and grandma are going to go to jail if they try to protect their children, things like that. So that's what you call the residential school syndrome, is you don't learn these things. So how are you able to teach your children anything like that? I forgot what the question was.

Q: You answered the question. Let's go back to the committee and what it was able to accomplish.

AF: I started talking with Daryl. I said, here are the issues; here are some of the issues. The only way that people are really going to listen is if I get the union involved. We need to start standing up here; we need to make them accountable. We're not just slaves here; we're here to work. We're human beings and we should be treated properly and given every right. We're not going to take this anymore; we can't. So I guess basically that's what we started talking about and thinking, okay, how are we going to make any changes? I said, well I'm going to become a shop steward. I said, I'm going to run for shop steward. So the same way my dad was chief, my grandpa was chief, I have many uncles that were chief and things like this. So I know how to be political. So I went around to all the First Nations people and Métis people and said, you know what, I'm going to run for shop steward so I need you guys to back me up, and you need to vote for me. So I went around and started my campaign and everything and it's like, yes I like this. So I got in as a shop steward.

Q: Are all the First Nations people you refer to working for Civeo, or are you talking about some clients as well?

AF: Oh no. We have about, well at the time there was about 20 First Nations within the Main and East Lodge. So there was a bit then because they were trying to hire some.

They had partnerships with Saddle Lake First Nation, Meadow Lake First Nation, so they brought a few of us up. But there was quite a bit that had quit because there wasn't a support system in place. Since we're so closely knit in our communities and then we go into camp life where we know nobody and you barely see a First Nations person, it's like you can't survive because no one's talking to you and you wonder, do they think you're crazy when you're walking down the hall and saying, hi, hi, because we're so used to that? Anywhere we go it's like hi. Then you go to camp and it's like you know nobody, you're just a number, and you're walking down the hallway and it's very lonely that way.

Q: Was the committee or the union able to do anything to accommodate the fact that you had all these First Nations people as members? Was it able to do anything for you?

AF: Yes. I just wanted to let you know that in order for me to be able to make any progress and to be a leader for my people, I had to become a shop steward in order to have that backing. So when they offered the course, it was on schedule for my days off and I said, okay, well as a leader you're going to have to make commitments. So I stayed in camp and took the shop steward course when I was supposed to be at home with my kids. I had called them and said, you know what, this is very important and I need to do this. So they understood. I said, I'll see you in another month. So I was at camp for seven weeks straight. I took the course and then I went back to work again. It was very hard but I'm glad I made that commitment because I also got the backing of the union now behind me as opposed to just one person. But now I was a voice for all the First Nations people out there at camp. So we started calling our little secret meetings because as First Nations people we don't want to cause any waves. We don't want people to know that there's problems here and that we're going to deal with them. But we were very secretive right at first. I said, okay, I went around, we're going to have a meeting at 7:30, executive boardroom, so everybody show up. Word of mouth, moccasin telegraph they call it. Nobody knows, but only the Native people knew; so we'd show up. So that's how me and Daryl got it started. Also, we were taking notes. I said, I need you guys to start writing down, documenting what's been happening at work, things like that. What problems do you have? What issues do we need to solve? So we started collecting those, started collecting them and realizing there are problems. They need somewhere to pray also, and they don't have that opportunity. Being First Nations, we're very spiritual. We can't survive without praying. We're very cultural and spiritual and very close knit. So I had to come up with ways. Okay, how am I going to deal with these issues here at camp? There's no support system in place for First Nations people and that's why a lot of them would quit or where they wouldn't say anything that was happening to them at work and they would quit or they would start drinking after work or on the weekends or whatever.

So people were getting into trouble. I said, okay we need to come up with some solutions now. Now I know the issues, we need to come up with solutions. So we started coming out in the open after this. All of a sudden management and that were like, what? I said, I'm the chair of the Indigenous Committee, I'm the chair of Wapasu First Nation Métis and Inuit Committee. They were like, what? They didn't even believe what was going on. I said, you need to change, you need to accommodate. I said, First Nations people need to have their spiritual right; it's a human right. So they were like, okay well come back and

talk to me later. It was in one ear and out the other. I was like, well this isn't going very well. But I kept on them. I said, well when are you available for a meeting? I'll drop by at 3 o'clock. I'd always make sure I had Daryl with me too, and he would be documenting while we talked or whatever. We always made sure that we always documented everything.

Then they started really seeing that we were serious and that they did have to accommodate First Nations people in their spirituality. I said, after all, I said, this is our land. I said, not because like we weren't saying that all of Canada is our land and things like that, but because we're on traditional land and Civeo PTI, you're working on this traditional land, so you should accommodate us. You accommodate other races and cultures for their religion, but there's absolutely no way you're accommodating us, and that's going to stop. So we told them we want a teepee. If you want us to go outside and smudge, then you need to provide us a teepee.

So they got us the teepee but guess what, it was way over there by the busy highway and it was 50 below outside. So I said, that's not going to work, I said. So now we started working on as a committee here's what we want. We want a stove inside that. So we worked on that and there was e-mails all the way to Houston, Texas and then they finally approved that we could have a stove in our teepee. Then we had to come up with fire protocols and all these emergency. It was funny because Daryl was also telling them there's never been a Native person that ever burnt down a teepee. So we laughed about it but we finally got their approval, so things went kind of smooth after that. But as our committee began gaining ground and taking back our human rights, then any issues that I brought up, as a shop steward and having the union behind me, they started listening. So I was just so grateful that I had the union back me up. Creating awareness, cultural awareness, is what I was doing. I was culturally training them. Everyone that I talked to, every manager that I spoke one-on-one, I went to them, I explained things. I said, this is what you need to do. I won them; I got them all on my side one by one.

Even with the union, because we don't really have any First Nations people within the union in a higher place, I started explaining a little bit to them. Well this is what we need and this is what needs to be done. I'm so thankful that they're like, okay Angela go ahead. I'm like, all right. I can do this, because I've always had that ability to be a leader since I was young. I think about the story when I was 12 years old. I made this little committee and it was only an all-girls club and it was on the reserve. It was like, you know what, we're going to be called the Pink Ladies. It was funny. I said, okay let's have a dance and let's all make cupcakes and sell them at the dance and everything. They're like, okay. So I was like their chair or their leader or whatever. So we made all these posters and put them up and then all of a sudden one of the councillors or something come from the band office and said, who's doing this? Who's the one that's setting up this dance? I said, that's me. She goes, well you didn't even ask if you could book the gym. Twelve years old, what do I know? I just said, I'm going to have a dance. So I said, well can we? She's like, okay then. So that was that. I don't know how we pulled it off but all of us had a dance and we charged I think \$2 to get in or \$1 or something. It was like we made a little bit of money and things like that. We did have people show up and we had a tape recorder. It

was really old school but it was fun. So that's how I got kind of my leadership experience. Also by listening to them, because they've been chief before and councillors and everything, so I've been involved in all of that. So I basically knew what I was doing when I became chair of the committee. I just stepped up and said, okay this is what I'm going to do, this is what I need you to do. I got everybody on my side, explained this is what we need to do as a whole. We need to back each other up, and I'm going to go there and fight for us.

Q: How is a chief selected in a band?

AF: Well chiefs don't just all of a sudden say, I want to be chief, and then run. They see your ability, you're able to be a leader. You see the changes that need to be done on the First Nations. When you live a positive lifestyle and when you have that education or you have that ability to lead your people, they just come up to you and they say, I want you to run for chief. Think about it. So my dad would think about it and then he said, okay. So then someone would nominate him.

Q: So there's a regular election?

AF: Yes, we have a regular election.

Q: Is it usually contested by two or three people?

AF: Sometimes some people just get in by acclamation because they're a good chief, and then sometimes, when you want changes, you have a few people running. When my grandpa first ran for chief, he told me the story of him running for chief in Flying Dust First Nation; he didn't want to. He didn't even want to. They were saying, you should run for chief and he said no, I don't want to. He refused up until the end, and the nominations come around and they nominated him and he was saying I don't want to run for chief. Then when elections came around they voted him in, so he had no choice, but he did a really awesome job. That's when all the changes are being made back in 1960s where you couldn't leave the reserve, things like this, where you had to have a paper in order to go get groceries in town. So he dealt a lot with the Indian agency agent and everything like that. He got the Aboriginal Achievement awards, he got Lifetime Achievement; he won that award. So he's made a lot of positive changes. So that's where I got my skills from, is just seeing all that and seeing all these changes. Any problems that I had at work also, I also went to my grandpa and I went to my uncles and I asked them, this is what's happening. How do I deal with these changes? How do I work with the policies? I would ask them that and they would give me advice. So I would take that advice from my elders and I'd go back to camp and start dealing with them the way they had told me how to. That's how also I became successful in that position, by gaining all of that.

Q: So the committee has been successful in accomplishing a few things?

AF: Yes, we did accomplish a few things. Well first of all it was the teepee. So we got the teepee out there and then we got the stove. But we also saw that need where, why do

we have to go outside? It's 50 below out, how cold the weather is out in Fort McMurray here in the wintertime. It's crazy, especially with the wind chill. So we're like, okay we need some different options here. But at the time there was nothing. We couldn't absolutely light a match inside the lodges or we'd get fired. So I had the chance and I was thinking, okay, we need to make policy changes now. So I knew what step I had to take. If they can't do this, then I'm going to go over there and I'm going to make some policy changes. Now how do I do that? I thought, well hey, negotiations are coming up. Boy did I ever pray. God, just let me get into negotiations so I can change the policy here for us First Nations people. So I had that opportunity. Then Chris walked up to me.

Q: Chris O'Halloran?

AF: Yes. I remember that. I was standing there and I was quite shy and kind of nervous a little bit. With the union I was like, oh big cheeses are here or something.

Q: Do you know Chris's father?

AF: Yes.

Q: He really is a big cheese.

AF: Yes. So Chris walks up to me and he says, hi, would you like to be on our negotiations? I was like, yes. I was like, I was so thankful and I was just so happy, thankful for that opportunity. So I went back to the committee and I said, you know I got on, this is how we're going to do it. I said, now we're going to have to change some policies here. So we started coming up with all these ideas. At the time I knew there was a lot of issues and I had to try and figure a way how to change it within the policies. So I had that opportunity in negotiations, and Tom Hesse was the one that really encouraged me also. They just made me feel very comfortable of being a First Nations person and actually listening to me, for them to encourage me and look at me as a real person. In society you don't have that opportunity, being a First Nations person, you don't anywhere. But with the union, the union is different.

Q: If you walk down the streets of Fort McMurray, are you telling me that you feel that somehow people are not treating you the same?

AF: Yes, I see it all the time.

Q: What do you see?

AF: You see them. It's the type of looks they give you or comments they make. Even I think it was last week when I heard a white guy say, and he was talking about this Native guy that was standing right there. I was off on the side and I was listening. He said, I'm sorry to say but white is always right. I was like, why do people still talk like that? Forgive me, and he's laughing with his peers, some ladies and some guys. They're all standing in a circle while I'm over here but I hear them talking. That Native guy is over

there on the other side of them. I was like, things need to change. It's taking a long time, but my people are starting to rise up now and they're starting to take back their rights and say, no we need these.

Q: So did the union accept the proposals to change policies?

AF: Yes. When it come down to it, when they were saying, okay, what are we going to do? I went around and said, you know what, for First Nations people, there needs to be some policy changes. So they put it in the proposal package but they didn't know really what I meant about that. But I had it all under control. So in negotiations that one month, I think it was January, Tom Hesse says to me, well Angela, are you ready? I said, no. I was still kind of scared and shy. It's like, no. He's like, we can do it next month and come back for negotiations. He said, okay. So I got ready again after that. But I had all my points. I knew basically what I was talking about but at the same time I was still unsure and I was still thinking, are they going to listen to me? Do they want to listen? Does the corporation want to listen? Is the union really behind me? I wasn't quite too sure yet. I didn't really know, because I was still dealing with all these issues at camp.

In February, I remember it was February, Tom Hesse asked, are you ready? He asked me again. I said, okay, give me another day. So I was just nervous because I was going to be making this presentation and everything. But they were all calm and they were behind me one hundred percent. So then again he said, okay Angela, are you ready, he goes in the morning. I go, okay. He goes, okay this afternoon you're going to take my chair; you're going to sit there. I was like, what? Me sit in Tom Hesse's chair? I felt so honoured. I just felt it was such a privilege to sit in his chair. He knows a lot and he's very intelligent and everything and then he's just giving his chair up to me for me to do this. I was like wow. I said, okay. So he goes, okay Angela, you're going to sit here. So I'm sitting in the middle and then the corporate would sit across from me, and then my union members here, my brothers and sisters on the sides there. So I sat there in the middle and I was like really nervous. But the day before, as a First Nations person, we always feed our guests. Anybody that comes to our house, we'll immediately make tea, coffee, and we'll cook them something.

Q: I'll remember that.

AF: Yes, that's how we are. So I was telling Patrick, he's a Métis, and I was telling him, you know they're coming. We can't feed them but I think we should make bannock. He's like, yes that's a good idea. So that's what he did. He went to his auntie's and made bannock the night before. He came back to the hotel that evening and said, I have the bannock and we have the butter and the raspberries. Great. So we brought it out in the morning. I remember we had put it out but we had covered it because we weren't going to break bread, it's called, like until that afternoon when the corporate come in. Then I was going to do my thing. But I remember Chris walked in and, oh bannock, and he goes straight to it, breaks it off, and he's walking around eating it and everybody's like, what are you doing? But it was funny and it was cool; it didn't matter. So negotiations were again in the afternoon so when corporate come walking in, they just looked at me. They

were like, I could just see it in their eyes like, what is Angela doing there in Tom Hesse's chair? Meanwhile I'm sitting there and meanwhile I'm really nervous but at the same time I was trying to act like I wasn't, like I had everything under control. I was calming myself down. I had to pray before; I just asked God the Creator to give me the right words and understanding and everything in order to gain ground for our people. So they come and sat down and I said, so before we sit down and start negotiations, I said, I'd like to feed you guys. We don't have a meal but we do have bannock and butter. They were so happy. Their faces just lit up and I was like, yes, great plan. So I said, go and help yourself before we start. So that's what they did; they went and helped themselves, and then we sat there. Then I went down about all the issues at camp and here's how to solve them. So I gave them all of that and then after that everybody was just clapping. Even management, even the ones from corporate. I was thinking, wow. It was the day the Indian won.

Q: At least they listened to you.

AF: Yes. So that was a big change; that was a big start. So they came back with a letter of understanding they wrote where we're allowed to practice our spiritual ways and cultural ways and also where they would have teepees up in the other camps and culture rooms, and we were going to be able to celebrate our Aboriginal Day with pay. We were allowed to actually leave work and go and organize it with pay, and go out there and celebrate our day, because our day is just a celebration of our existence. So that was the day the Indian won, and I felt so proud. I was like, I did this for us, for our people. If it wasn't for them believing in me, backing me up, if it wasn't for the union backing me up, none of this, I couldn't have accomplished anything.

Q: That's really good.

AF: It was. I remember right after that letter of understanding--we didn't even sign the contract yet. I went back to camp and I just said, okay we're looking for a culture room, I said. So I went around and I said we want this one. This is the one we're going to have, this room. So I just took over. That's just what I do. I just took over and I went and called up Matt, who was the lodge manager. He wasn't the senior lodge manager; he was just the junior one at the time. Then we had the director of operations come in, and he was in on negotiations too. So he came and I said, well this is the room we want. They looked around and said, okay. I said, based on this reason, we're able to smudge. There's the fan up there and it doesn't come into the building and it goes straight out; this is the room. They said, okay. I said, okay. So we had it solved within ten minutes; that was it.

So the next day I was just telling maintenance and everything, okay you guys need to move this; get this out of here. We want new rug in here, I said, and I went on and on. Then, every once in a while, I'd tell corporate, okay, you've got to find us some couches and things like that. So that's where I started. So we got new rug in there but there was nothing else in there. I brought in my own table and a chair, pulled it out from one of the games rooms, put it in there. Pulled out my notebook and my pen, and that's where I began organizing Aboriginal Days. We had a four-day celebration and everything. So it took a lot of work. I started working with the committee – this is what we need, this is

what you need to do, this is you know. We actually got our Aboriginal Day menu picked by the committee members. We got to decide what we wanted to eat on Aboriginal Day, so that's what we did. I submitted it to the corporate chef. I e-mailed him, Chef Denis. He goes, well Angela, he sends me an e-mail back. He said, well Angela, I made a few changes to this. I was just upset. I e-mailed him back. Well I said, then you can eat it. Go ahead, I said, make it the way you want it. I said, you can eat it, I said, because as First Nations people, Aboriginal people, we don't eat that way. Oh I'm so sorry Angela, he says. He e-mailed me back: I'll put it back the way you want it. I was like, yes. I want things done. It has to be done properly. That's what I told them.

Even my lodge manager, it's funny, because he laughs at me. I said, well, you know, you give me an inch and I take a mile, you know that. He's like... They were trying to get me to do housework while I was working doing housecleaning and then also trying to organize Aboriginal Days, and that's corporate work. That's all management work, corporate work that I was doing, plus getting everything in order with the culture room and the teepee. It took a lot of work and it took a lot of man-hours and organizing, but I did it. I said this is what we need, this is what we do. So they were trying to make me go into housekeeping for half a day or you know and then do my other work for half a day. I said no, I don't have time. He was looking at me and saying, ? Angela. I said, I'm going to sit here and I'm going to do this. I said, it needs to be done properly, the right way, I said. So Chris said, anything you need you just let me know and I'll let management know. I said, okay if I have any problems, but it's good.

Q: Has there been any pushback as a result of your progress?

AF: Yes, there has been. On Aboriginal Day, management was, well some of them they were prohibiting them from participating in Aboriginal Day. They weren't allowed to go and celebrate. They had to stay in their work placement. They said, well if you want to go and celebrate or do anything with the committee then you're going to have to clock out. We had to fight against that. We said, in this contract we have it with pay. So we had to get the union involved and I kind of enforced it and then I got my Aboriginal liaison worker to go out there and you go get them. But they listened to me but they didn't really listen to many other people, like our Aboriginal liaison worker. They didn't really listen to her. But it was like I knew what I was doing and I knew that I had the backing of the union and I knew what was right. So, when I said it, they did it. Or if they tried not to, well they had no choice, they're going to listen to me because I'm doing it the right way. So I don't know, I think I just kind of have that--I don't know if it's authority or I know what I'm doing, that they should.

I also told them too, Aboriginal relations are very important. If you don't want to listen to me, it's called moccasin telegraph in that the people in Saskatchewan – my brother, my uncles, the chiefs – they're going to hear. If you don't want to work with us, that's fine; we'll get another company out there. It's up to you. So I think they started acting on that too. But then again they were saying Angela's too political. But I got things done, what we needed to get done at the committee. We did have a few people, not just corporate, because I did get to see an e-mail from corporate when our Aboriginal liaison worker

had told me, they don't think Aboriginal Day is anything. They're calling it like Valentine's Day. I said, what? I said, that's our rights, that's Aboriginal like we're born; those are our human rights. I said, whether or not they think it's okay to smudge or whether or not it's one person or a hundred people, they are going to accommodate and they have no choice. So I had that and I said I want you to forward me that e-mail, which she did. I don't think she knew that she shouldn't have, but she did. I saved it. I put it in my...

Q: In your files.

AF: Yes. Because they said it was like Valentine's Day or St. Patrick's Day, just a petty little celebration. It was like no, these are our human rights; this is our day. So that's some of the things that the union has backed me up on. I've also had some experience with some of my co-workers, my First Nations co-workers. There were a few that were very traditional where they didn't like to have anything written down on paper. A lot of it is oral, but in today's society we can't just speak it; it needs to be written down. So that's why I made sure that we had a letter of understanding within the contract so they have no choice but to, and we can enforce that as a union.

Q: So far, has the letter of understanding been honoured?

AF: Yes. We're going through it again. It's like I felt like I had to renegotiate it again even though it's already signed, but they have a new lady that is in corporate that just got into this position and she knows absolutely nothing. So she came up and I said no, this is what it means. Well I negotiated this, I know what it means. So we kind of started off rocky with corporate; the first couple meetings weren't very pleasant. But after she realized all the work that that committee has put in and everything, then she understood and she was good. So I'm thinking now this letter of understanding is going to be enforced now, hopefully.

Q: She must have looked at it and gone, what's this?

AF: Exactly. No other union has that. No other camps have a culture room or a teepee out there for the First Nations people. Civeo is the only one ever to have something like that. We had Australian HR, two ladies from Australia come up and they come to see the culture room. We took them to the culture room; we explained it. We took them out to the teepee, things like that. We gave them gifts. I have them a pair of earrings like this that were fully beaded and that they were just in love with. So we got some quickly made and we gave them to them before they left back to Australia. So they're making culture rooms over there.

Q: It seems to me that you have an opportunity to spread that across Canada, too.

AF: Yes.

Q: At least in Western Canada.

AF: Yes. I'm hoping, because everybody needs to have that type of Aboriginal relations. They need to build it once again.

Q: I hope we can build on that, using this bit of footage.

AF: Yes, I hope so too.

Q: How do you feel about these industries invading the land?

AF: It's hard being a First Nations person who works out in the oilfields, like out in tar sands or oil sands--politically correct, but it's still the same thing. It's hard for us to work out there because we see what's going on. We also hear, like I started bringing in the elders as part of my support for our First Nations. I started building that relationship and bringing in the elders. To hear the ones from Fort MacKay telling us, I remember when Clara uh, I think it's Boucher, that elder, she had said to us a long time ago, we used to die of old age and now we die of cancer. That hits home for me because as First Nations people, we honour our elders. For an elder to say that, that they don't have a choice, that it's killing them and it's also killing the next generations--how are we able to survive? Then, for me to be a part of it, working out here. I'm not directly onsite but I'm still a part of it. What can I do?

It's a very thin line which we walk. I want to make sure that my people have a job but that we can also support one another being out there and learn to forgive, and also knowing that the Creator always has us in his hands. We're very close to the earth and we're very close to Mother Earth and everything that's going on out here. By having our culture room and our teepee out there to pray, and not only for us Civeo employees but also for the other clients that are First Nations that are working out at the site and coming out, they're so grateful. We're also asking for forgiveness when we go pray but we're also watching and making sure that things are done right on these lands that belong to us, the traditional lands. We say us even though we're not from Fort McMurray or from Fort MacKay or anything. But that's still the same; we're still the same people. So we say our lands because we take up that responsibility also. A lot of us do talk about things like that out at camp. We see what's happening and we also don't like it, but we also need that education so that we're out there and we're the boss and we're making sure that they're doing things properly and they're being accountable. So if our people are not rising up and not getting an education, then we're always going to be at the bottom and we won't know what's going on and we can't make any changes. That's why I tried so hard to get into management, get into corporate and things like that. But I didn't have the opportunity, but I still made a way even though they wouldn't. There's always going to be a way.

So hearing all of these negative issues that come out of the oil sands, people getting cancer, like our people getting cancer, people not being able to eat their traditional food and we've always survived on it. Even now to this day, if we can go out and kill a moose, well, we'll eat that instead of going out and buying meat. That's just the way we are. Plus

our bodies are used to that, where we are supposed to be eating our wild meat. That's the way the Creator made us. We weren't made to be eating pork or things like that, the things that they bring in. It doesn't agree with us, and that's why a lot of us have diabetes and stuff, because we can't adjust to that food. We're supposed to eat our traditional food. So it's very hard, it's very hard. I think a lot of us, we know what's going on. We see what's going on in the political world. That weighs heavy on me because I'm very involved in Idle No More. I'll support them. It's our human rights. We do need this water.

I also think about Saskatchewan and how it's going to be the next booming province and we're going to have all these oil sands, and they started that already. And how my boys are registered in Mosquito First Nation and how they signed a deal, and they don't even know what's going on. Who signed that deal? It's things like that where we need to step up. If we're going to have this oil industry and it's not going away, we need to make sure that we're in charge. We need to make sure that there's Aboriginal relations there. If they don't want to, then I'm sorry you can't come on our land and do that unless you're making us partners, unless you tell us what's going on, and we have our own lawyers to see what's going on, and things like that. It's all about working with us and making sure things are done properly. When they don't, that's when our Native people feel bad and we don't want it to go on. That's why a lot of people quit too. A lot of my people quit too because they see what's happening out here and they feel guilty. I also had someone on my Facebook had said to me and actually quite embarrassed me. He said, you're either with us or against us.

Q: Meaning you're working there so you're against us?

AF: Yes. It really bothered me because I'm not against my people. I am working for my children to make sure that they are fed. This is why I'm out here. I'm not out here because I want this luxurious lifestyle; it hasn't happened yet. I'm out here because my girls are in university and my other kids are younger. I can afford to pay for their sports. I'm going to make sure that they're not a part of that residential cycle or anything like that. I want to make sure they break out of it. They see their mother working. They are going to be in my footsteps, and they are going to make sure that their children are well taken care of also.

Q: That explains the dilemma perfectly.

AF: Yes, it's for our children. It's not only for our children, I also think about the generations that are going to come underneath me. So what I'm trying to establish is that there is a good working environment for them. They have the support system in place. We have our elders that are coming in from Fort MacKay. We have our culture room; we have somewhere for them to pray. We have our committee that supports one another and stands strong just like our union.

Q: The union is a very important vehicle.

AF: Oh yes.

Q: It has to be expanded to include these issues.

AF: Yes, and if it wasn't for the union I wouldn't have been able to accomplish anything. I'm just so thankful.

Q: Do you know Muriel Stanley Venne?

AF: I've met her.

Q: She's on the board of ALHI. She'll be pleased to hear your words.

AF: There's only one more thing that I wanted to say.

Q: Say whatever else you'd like.

AF: I'm not sure where this would fit in but I do. I don't know where this is going, but I need to get this out and someone needs to hear me.

The First Nations people that work out there in the accommodation site, we get taxed because they say it's not, I mean it's a political issue, but there needs to be some agreements like our treaty agreements that say we're not going to be taxed, but yet we still are. So we're trying to get ahead. As First Nations people, we come from Third World conditions, and that's how it is on all the reserves even today. We don't get everything handed to us. We need to work. I worked hard to get where I am today. I sacrificed a lot. So the government needs to see that too. I don't know how we're going to get through to them. They need to keep their agreements. We said you can use this land. We didn't say take it away from us and put us on reserves and not let us off. We made agreements with them and they need to honour that.

Not only that; they also have the benefit impact agreement. It's an agreement that is signed with either Fort MacKay First Nation and the oil companies. So in that agreement it states that they are going to be hiring First Nations people and also that the equality act within the government states that you should be hiring or that it's mandatory to hire Aboriginal people and women. So that isn't happening out at camps. We can't even keep a quota at camp of any First Nations people out there. Our quota is probably 3%. Three percent of us are First Nations, Inuit, Métis out at camp. That's unacceptable. They are on our land so they should be employing us. Oh, they say, well we deal with it this way. We'll hire 100 people at this camp over here and that should make up for the quota. No, I don't think so. We're out here, we're on Mary Char's trapline, and she agrees that they need to be hiring First Nations people. But nobody listens to her either.

It's sad because the people at camp and the people who work at site and things, they all think she's rich, that she's like a millionaire or something. She isn't. She doesn't get one cent. I feel so bad that they're taking advantage of my people, especially an elder like that. It should be; it shouldn't be that way. She should be living comfortably. She's old.

She gave up her trapline for all of us to be out there working so that we're able to support our families and in turn help the economy and everything like that. She gave that up. What does she get out of it? Nothing.

So, when I was organizing Aboriginal Days, I thought about her and I thought about what a blessing she is to us First Nations people that we're able to come out and work on her land and her trapline and be able to support our families and help our people back at the reserve. A lot of us don't just gather our money and put it in our bank account. We're helping whoever we can, whoever needs money, whoever needs help in anything. We're out there as First Nations people; we share. We're out there supporting different households, anybody who needs help. They're like, Angela, I need some money for gas; can I borrow some? I'm like, sure here you go, and I don't expect it back. I know how hard it is to be a First Nations person and to be on welfare and not to have that opportunity. So these camps need to start hiring us, and they're not. They can't say that we're not applying, because I'm a step ahead of them. I already started collecting resumes. I said, you apply online and at the same time you send me your resume at the same time so that I have it documented what day and what time you applied.

So I have a bunch of resumes in my e-mail folder, yes. So I started saying that too. We started talking about Aboriginal relations and everything and how they need to start working with us. So I've also brought that up with corporate and I had discussed that about how our quota is so small that people are getting laid off. Especially now with the low oil prices, a lot of the people that were first laid off are the First Nations people because they started hiring a little bit after I started raising awareness and saying that these jobs are rightfully ours. If you're going to hire anybody, you need to make sure that you're hiring First Nations people and then, like the contract says, if you can't find anybody, well then you hire from surrounding communities, and then you hire anybody else for specialty tasks or whatever. If there's nobody there that can do it, okay yes, you bring in a foreign worker. But being a housekeeper and being a kitchen worker, you can just walk off the street and be hired into those positions. You don't need specialty tasks; you don't need to be trained for ten years to go and wash dishes. So why aren't my people being hired? That's something that the companies out here need to work on. In order for them to be successful anywhere else, they need to start acknowledging First Nations people. They need to start hiring us. They need to build that Aboriginal relations. Not because it's mandatory, but because it's the right thing to do.

Q: And if they don't do the right thing, then you're going to make it mandatory.

AF: Oh yes. So that's another one of the issues that I wanted to work on with the union. I'm hoping somehow, I don't know how we can do this, but I know our contract says you're laid off by seniority and then your call-back is by seniority. But that doesn't help our quota, our First Nations quota. So I didn't question them, but I was questioning it as to how can we change this. I'm thinking once they come to Saskatchewan and once we start there, we need to come up with a contract that says specifically where there's no gray area that says you'll be hiring, and this is how much percent needs to be in there.

That's only right. Why should we be starving and barely making it when you're working and you're drilling oil on my land right here?

Q: Making millions.

AF: Millions and millions every day. Yet we don't even have \$5 to go buy bread. That needs to stop, simple as that.

[END]