

Siobhan Vipond

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Camera: Don Bouzek

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SV: My name is Siobhan Vipond, and I'm the secretary treasurer for the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Q: Tell us about your background.

SV: I'm first generation Canadian to Irish parents. My parents got married and immigrated to Canada and came to Calgary. They came to do something, to get more opportunity than they had in Ireland. In true Irish fashion of course, I was born a year after they got married; that's just how they did it. It's myself and my brother. Because I have immigrant parents, although they didn't have language barriers, there are cultural barriers. They only exist or you only learn that they exist once you grow up and have more contact with families of different cultures and realize that everybody we knew were Irish. I Irish dance, my mom was an Irish dance teacher, my dad coached soccer to mostly Irish kids. So we had a very Irish culture within Calgary. Even some of the words you use, like TV remote; we called it a controller. You didn't signal to turn to change lanes, you indicated. Just little changes, but when you grow up you can appreciate that, maybe appreciate's the wrong word, but you realize that you've been using words that are so culturally attached. I feel very lucky.

I have great parents and they both have had union jobs. At the time, mom wasn't in a union job but my dad was a trade painter and he worked on the army base in Calgary for most of my childhood. That's how he was also heavily involved in his union. My earliest memories of what unions meant was as a kid we would go to the meetings in the evening, and we got to go in the back room and use the big paper with the big markers. That's what unions meant to me, is it was a free-for-all for us to use as much paper and make as much pictures. I think my dad actually still has one because it also got laminated, which I think is because the union had a union laminator. It wasn't something that was extravagant but it was something we didn't have at home. As a child you just understood that people were getting together to talk about work, and we got to come along and that's just what it was about. It was nothing political; it wasn't anything that needed to be over explained. It was just understood that their job was to get together and talk about work. Also because we're Irish, being union isn't something special; it's not something out of the ordinary. It's just what you did. You got a job, you had a union. It's simple. So there's just an acceptance that happens when you come from a culture like that.

I think there are many kids who have European parents, that unions just have a different meaning. It seems now that maybe it's more Canadian that you choose to have a union job or some people have union jobs, but it's not normal, it's not the central line, which it is in Ireland. That's changing now but when I was growing up you got a job for life if you were doing well, and that job was unionized. So my mom was a secretary or

administrative assistant, but I believe it was called secretary when I was young, and my dad was a painter. They were heavily involved in the Irish community. But since then my mom also became a - not a flight attendant, that's the wrong term - a cabin crew member for Aer Lingus, so she was unionized there. Again, you were unionized because that's what you did. It's wonderful when you have parents who change their careers during their lives because they always choose to do what they wanted to do. My dad's still a house painter, but he's always doing things that are exciting. I've actually been to both my parents' high school graduation and college graduation, because they both did that just because of the way opportunity works and life works, that happened after both my brother and I were born. So I think it's a great lesson that you just don't give up. You don't just accept something because - well the timeline doesn't match what perfect is. You just make it what it is. I think that's something I always followed in my life.

I knew from very early, and it's because I'm a little bit stubborn, but I always knew I would go into theatre. My parents never questioned that. It was never, well that's not a real job or that's not going to get you anywhere, you might not be able to support your family. It was always, well you're going to do what you want to do, and if you love it that's great. So I have two parents who were always very proud, maybe not of absolutely everything I did, but overall everything I did. That gives you a different perspective because you never have that internal disagreement or struggle with your parents of trying to justify what you need to do. It was just always accepted. So I got to go to art schools, I got to take art classes, I got to take dance classes. When I decided to go to college and take theatre production because I wanted to work backstage, the question was, if that's really what you want to do, because you once said you wanted to work in film, but that's great. They've always been proud. I also knew that I would be unionized. That's just part of life so to me it seemed like that's what was going to happen.

In Edmonton and most of Canada, if you're a theatre technician, you're IATSE. I knew in college that if I was successful, I would become an IATSE member. It was a benchmark and I worked very hard at it, because IATSE is maybe different than a workplace that's unionized. You get a job there, you become union. IATSE is a hiring hall, which you have to get your hours. You have to apply, you have to be accepted, you have to have the credentials that they're requiring at the time for membership. So it's an honour and it's a goal. It wasn't the easiest thing; it didn't just happen. It was taking calls, it was doing different type of work. I went to theatre college and when I came out of my program, I wanted to do everything. I know some people come out and they're like, sound is what I want to do. I just enjoyed so much of it. I really enjoyed props and I really enjoyed carpentry and I really enjoyed lighting and production managing and technical director. So I was excited for whatever job would come.

Not one of my favourite departments was wardrobe. It wasn't I had had anything against it. It just hadn't been one of the big pulls. But I did end up at the Citadel in a wardrobe job. It's one of those things that if you're the type of person and someone says, can you do this, I'm the type of person that's, well yes. I'll give it a try, if it doesn't work out it doesn't work out. So one of my first longer term jobs was at the Citadel and it was dressing Christmas Carol. That's where I got the majority of my hours that I needed near the end,

so I could apply for membership. When I got accepted into the union and got my letter that I would be allowed in, I was over the moon. That feeling of when you're young and have successes, you kind of go, what could be next? I've reached this goal, now in life you just make more goals. So it was just one of those things that was a great honour to me. My step dad is a unionized cameraman for his entire career. As many stepchildren will share, especially when you become a stepchild after you've left. So I've never lived with my step dad in a father-daughter relationship but he's always been there for me. But there's a difference between being there day-to-day and just being there kind of at a distance. Often we would talk through my mother – how's he doing? Oh he says hi - that kind of thing. When we were together we'd discuss things. But he always knew what my goals were. He wrote me a letter and gave me a cheque for my membership fees when I got accepted. I remember reading the letter and being touched because it was just kind. I remember phoning my mom and saying to her, I got the letter so I just wanted to say thank you, with the cheque. My mom didn't know about it. It made it so much more special because it was not a joint Christmas present; it wasn't a joint birthday present. It was something individual. So now I have three parents so happy that I'm doing what I love and supporting me every step of the way and want me to succeed but never doing it for me, just being there for me. So I feel very lucky.

I loved being sworn in and I was so happy that I got to say that I was IATSE, not just because of what that meant in terms of my career as a technician, but it meant I was unionized. I could remember what that meant to my dad and I got lots of stories from my dad because he came to Jasper school and he's also been to the AFL school I believe it was in Banff at one point. He used to go to conferences all the time. It's kind of a strange world now because every now and then I run into people who know him and maybe remember me as a kid. It's just an interesting crossing. I just remember the stories of something that was very important to him, very passionate about it. In our house, people would meet, people would come over because they're meeting about something, whether it was some campaign or some issue. That discussion and that energy of being able to contribute to the solution and that it was possible and you didn't need to be a special person or you didn't need to be an exceptional person, you just needed to be a person willing to contribute.

So it was wonderful so now I'm in a union. I had a great career, or having a great career. I kind of feel like I've left it now that I'm at the Alberta Federation of Labour, but in my theatre career I got to do so many shows and got to work with so many fantastic people. I did leave wardrobe, I ended up as the assistant head of wardrobe at the Citadel. But I knew that it wasn't my end goal so there comes a time where you have to take a leap and go into something else. As much as I loved it, I loved being a stage carpenter more. So I did, and I worked as a stage carpenter. I worked as, we called it electrician, but it's stage electrician, it's not a certified electrician. I have a lot of respect for that trade. So I got to do that and someone says, oh I'm working on this TV show, do you think you can come help? Then you start doing that. I remember being in New York and doing a job interview on my cell phone, and that was the first TV show I ever worked on. I got to work on many shows and films, always in the props department. That was great opportunities. Again it's all about the people that you meet, because sometimes the work sucks or it

doesn't suck, but really it's the people that you're with. You have no control over what the end product is. You have control over what you can do and the team that you get to work with. So I feel very lucky.

I was a steward. We have many jobs coming out of a hiring hall, the union. We have many jobs but it's seniority that makes you the steward. It's not whether you're willing or wanting to do it, it's if you're the lowest number on the list you're the steward. Every now and then you'd end up on a job, and we used to joke, especially as junior members going, oh must be a busy day, I'm the steward. Because where's everybody else above you? We're all aware, I still know what number I am in the seniority list, it's how work goes. I know who's above me. I know who's right behind me. You just get used to it and that's the way it is. The work trickles down or it doesn't, depending on how busy we are. I loved being a steward, I think partly because I loved so much about the union but it also pushed into my, if you have little characters inside you that are what you are, sometimes I'm a little bit like a camp councilor. If you don't like me some people call it bossy, but if you like me you just call it organized. I have the ability to organize. So when we were dispatched to a call you ended up being a steward and working in different ways.

When I worked on TV shows, that was by election. So to be a steward on a show like that is a little bit different, because you're elected by the co-workers. But it also means you've chosen to do that. That changed how I was treated by employers, because no longer am I the steward because of the position I have when I was sworn in, I'm now the steward because I think union business is important enough to be the person standing up for it. I wouldn't say it was very negative feedback; we have great relationships with most of the employers. I think that can be attributed to the working relationship being our goal here is to get this show done, what do we need to do, and we fix it on the way. That's helpful. But to say there's no repercussions to deciding to be a steward I think is a little naïve, because there are. It's maybe one of the first times that you learn that not everybody thinks unions are the answer. How dare they not understand that? So that's part of the learning curve, because all of this is leading me to finally saying I don't completely like how my union is being run. So I'm not going to be someone who complains on the coffee room, I'm going to be someone who joins the executive and tries to fix it. So that's what I did and I ran to be a ... we have two vice presidents in our local and I ran to be the first vice president which is in charge of the stage side and I ran against the incumbent, which is always the best way to get into an executive because you're coming in very clearly, because you're trying to change something.

It was a three-way election and it was very close between me and I just beat out the incumbent. I have a great working relationship with the person I replaced. It took a little bit of time but I think there was appreciation of why I wanted to change it and what didn't work, but at the same time, not to dismiss that she had lots of advice and was able to assist me to be better at what that job was. So I got to be vice-president, again another kind of goal in life that was reached and again having family and friends who were supportive of that, and my parents. Again, it all made sense that this is what I would do would be to join my union. So I was on my board and we had sometimes a rep that sat on the Alberta Federation of Labour.

I got to go to the convention and experience that. I went with the other one person that did sometimes go to conventions from IATSE and he kind of showed me the ropes, because it's very intimidating when you first walk in and there's so many people and there's so many large unions and they're all either wearing the same coloured jackets or they've all got their flags - and you're part of a very small union and you're both there. But it was fascinating to me and I just sat there and the information, and I was sucking it in going, this is great, this is absolutely great. Then going home and getting to talk to my dad and then him sharing even more stories about what his experience was. During that weekend we then went and the person I was with was like, "oh you should run for the rep, because we were in the triple-9 caucus."

When we were at the meeting and talking again I didn't fully understand what triple 9 caucus meant. In Alberta IATSE had 1100 members. So someone turned to me and goes, well you guys can have your own rep because you're over 1000, you don't need to be part of the triple 9 caucus. So I got elected as the IATSE rep by the other IATSE person who was there. I was endorsed by the two locals because they were happy that someone was able to make the time to be on the Fed. We are - IATSE locals are - required by our international constitution to participate. Sometimes that means just cheques get written and no further involvement, but it also means we have a long history. Our current international president says it's very important, so we're constantly reminded that whether it's a district labour council or the CLC or the federations, these are opportunities for us not only to get assistance, but to be of assistance. So I got to sit on the AFL, again a very intimidating process of sitting around a table with leaders, real leaders. It was fascinating and I loved it and it became a bigger part of my life. We don't have like book-offs or the way some other unions, because we don't have fulltime jobs in my industry. You work, you're basically a freelance worker, so you take jobs or don't take jobs. There's an AFL meeting so I won't take that job that week but we'll work the next week just so you can get to do everything so more and more and then being more and more involved in my local.

We got to take calls, or I got to work on the executive but as it happens often when you have a small group of people the executive are also all the people on the committees so you end up being involved in many ways. It's fun, it's a lot of fun. Our union from being on the executive you get to take courses, so I started to come to the AFL schools. I've been to five of them, this is my sixth one I believe. Of course I'm not taking a course this year, a little too busy. So I served, I did two terms as first vice president. In the middle of my second term, the way our constitution reads, I replaced the president, so then I was the president of my local. That was an honour and daunting and one of those tasks you wish you could do more. But when you're volunteer executive member, your limitations exist because you have to keep jobs that pay you. You want to do more and you want to be at every meeting and go to every worksite, then you realize that your mortgage doesn't appreciate if you don't have income. So then you start making choices for money, which is something that I fundamentally don't believe in. I believe you make choices, whether its because you love theatre, you love to work on film, you want to work with that person, you want to be involved with your union, this is a better choice. But then I wouldn't say

‘forced’, but it's just you do have to make money. So it took a little bit of the shine off of the job because then the jobs also became about me having to work and not working on things that I was getting more interested in, which was the union work.

A great opportunity I got being from a small local is negotiating. I was very new compared to most people who get to negotiate contracts are, but we had nobody else who was negotiating. I had taken courses and I was interested in it and I grew up in a household where my dad would argue for argue's sake, so I understood the idea of an argument. So I got to sit at the table and negotiate contracts, and I loved it. I loved the problem solving of it, I loved the working through logical arguments to try and make sure that our language matched what we actually wanted to say, and I loved standing up for people. If I was standing there, on film you negotiate your own agreement within the collective agreement. You meet with the producer and you say, the minimal standard is the collective agreement but everything else you negotiate out depending on your experience or what you're bringing to the table. I hated that, I hated it. I would sit there and you'd have to say, I am worth this. I had a very tough time doing it. Most of the time I brought in the head of my department and just kind of let them speak in terms of what was worth it. But to sit at a table and know that the 20 people I talked to this morning and want me to get this agreement to say this, well bring it on, I can do it. That was great for me, because that was easy. It was easy to justify. I had a hard time justifying it for me, but I know that those people deserve more money, better wages – better wages, better job, better conditions. So I got to be the lead negotiator, which seems like a really quick timeline. At the time it always seems like it's taking a long time.

So, during my cycle there, I negotiated every single collective agreement that we have at IATSE; I believe there's seven of them. Again different employers, it's a different negotiating tools. I come from a blue-collar family so to sit across the table from a lawyer and having to explain to the lawyer that that's not actually what the labour law says. And in this process, it's what happens. You I don't know, it feels good. In one way I had this impression that she should know more because she's a lawyer and she went and got educated as a lawyer, and I'm more from the work floor. Not that I felt less than her but felt that she would be able to explain to me items, not the other way around. So it was a really good experience. Then the employer after a couple meetings the lawyer was no longer the speaker. So again I got to tell my dad that and he just laughed because he'd had similar experiences where it's like sometimes, it just doesn't work out that way. So it was always great.

It was only last year we learned that Nancy Furlong of course was leaving as the secretary treasurer at the AFL. Someone had approached me and asked me what I thought of that and had I ever thought of doing that as a job. I laughed, of course I never thought of doing it as a job. It's not that I never thought of it because I didn't want the job, it was more that it was a job that I never thought I could do or it just wasn't in my sights I guess. The person was, well you should think about it. I just kind of left and I remember talking it over with my husband. I'm sitting around this table with people who have years and years of experience, and they share their stories and their struggles, and I'm in awe. My career has brought me to work with stars all the time and it's great. I have a lot of respect

for what they do as artists, and we can share that. But I don't ever remember feeling so nervous that I could hardly speak. But I often felt that at breaks at the AFL when you're surrounded by these people at this table. So then the idea that you would now be someone to represent these people at the AFL and work with them on an equal level just seemed a little ludicrous. But a couple more people asked me, so I nervously was saying, I'm interested but I'm scared that I might not have the skills that are needed to do this job. I didn't know exactly how big this job was. I had an idea but I had never done many of the, well I'd never been the secretary treasurer of a federation before I guess. So it was terrifying.

I was at an IATSE district meeting, which is basically Western Canada, one of the districts. So we were in Vancouver and I spoke with not only some of my executive members from Edmonton, but some executive members from Calgary, which is our only other provincial local, and then also our Canadian leadership. I just said, this is kind of what's in the pipeline, I don't know if it's going to happen. Their answer was, yes of course, okay, just tell us what you need. I was shocked. They were like, you'd be great at that, this is fantastic. They saw it as a great opportunity and were so supportive. Again, instead of me sitting in front of an employer asking for something for me, I was now going to be in a position where I had all these people who were willing to support me.

I'm not foolish. When you come from a delegation of one I couldn't just go into the convention and say, well my entire delegation is voting for me so I've got this in the bag. So you have to start doing the politics of it and finding out did other unions have people running, did they have anybody to support. That process was terrifying but it was also refreshing and invigorating. Everybody I spoke with, whether or not they were willing to say they were supportive of me or not, had advice for me. I appreciate that because I am new, I'm new to the movement. The advice was sometimes in terms of how, not how to do things but have you thought about this, have you thought about how this impacts your private life, have you thought about how this impacts your family, have you thought about how this will impact your career once your career in this is finished. It was all good questions because I hadn't really thought about that, but it meant I could have an educated discussion with my husband in saying, this is the advice I've been given and these are the questions people have suggested we think about and talk about. It was a big career change and as much as I wanted to do it you don't want to just do it foolishly. So here I was and my husband again surrounded by more people and my husband's like, if that's what you want to do, do it. He of course always said, you can do it so let's just do it. So that's what we decided to do. Again I have great friends and colleagues and they all stepped up to the plate, whether it was designing my pamphlet or designing the buttons. That's what's great when you work in an industry like the film industry or the theater industry, is that you know a lot of Jack and Jills of a lot of trades. Yes maybe I don't know somebody who is a fulltime designer of print media, but I know someone who does the programs for her theatre. So you get to ask these people for advice and it was great. People were more than happy and were excited for me. Many people didn't fully understand what it was.

Q: We may have to continue this tomorrow. . . . For now, just continue telling the story.

SV: So this election process; your friends just want to offer help. I just felt like I know so many talented wonderful people and they're like, what do you need, what do you need? Then hitting convention, and it was a blur, up very early and talking to people all day. But the more people you talk to, even if people were saying to you, I think I'm going to vote for someone else. But, I think it's great what you're doing, and then the support. Obviously I won the election so the support did come in, and that felt crazy. Then when it was all done and the weekend was all over and I went, oh my goodness, I have a new job. Even as simple as I had one more week to work on a TV show I had been working on, in the wardrobe truck. I phoned her and I said to her, I said, I'm so tired, so if you find someone to replace me on the rest of the show, even if I don't win this election, that's okay. So she looked for someone to see if she could find anyone to replace me. So it meant that at the end of convention I could actually go straight to the AFL to work or I could sleep and probably cry and feel sorry for myself, but that passes.

So everybody that I came across was supportive, and I love that. I think people are good and I think you can see good in people all the time and different measures of it. It doesn't have to be an extraordinary piece of help, but even we announced at our IATSE meeting that we were having a host evening at the hotel during convention and members were welcome to join and come by and say hi, and assumedly people who didn't want to wouldn't. But there was a couple of people who I never in a million years would've expected to show up, and they came by and just were like, I just wanted to say good luck and we think what you're doing is great. I loved that. I come from a, there's 350 IATSE 210 members and I probably know about 280 of them and the others I probably cross paths with but I just don't know them.

So it makes for a different environment when you know your membership. It's just because of the type of work we do – it's not one workplace. You're constantly changing workplaces, so you learn who people are. So I got this job and I showed up. I think I was elected at 11:30 and then that afternoon of the Sunday I went to the day of mourning, which isn't funny, but the day of mourning proceedings and kind of again just kind of numb going, I can't believe this is what's happening, I can't believe I can introduce myself as the secretary treasurer. I probably couldn't at the time. I just was in shock. I showed up to work the next day and it was weird. I think Nancy Furlong was wonderful at what she did. What she provided the Federation was valuable and she made the Federation stronger. To fill those shoes, and you don't even know what the shoes are other than that they were great, is difficult and intimidating. I'm appreciative that now I can call her a friend and I can call her on the phone and just ask her questions. I think I'm bugging her and she doesn't think I'm bugging her, so we'll go with her plan for now. It means that I think I can do this job.

Q: How does the union do its job?

SV: IATSE is a hiring hall. So, we constantly are not only performing the duties of being like a hiring or employment agency; we're also the union. So when productions come into town, whether it's a movie, a film, a TV show, or a star coming into a theatre, they would

phone the hall and they would say, we need this many hands, this many electricians. Then that gets dispatched from our offices. You're bargaining with them because you want the work, so our business agent acts by talking to producers or production managers, how can we make it good for you? They go back saying, this might be too expensive or why is this so expensive, it's because it's on a holiday, these are the penalties and this is our agreement, this is how it works. Sometimes it's under a collective agreement and a lot of times it's under what we call a rate card, which is when you phone IATSE and you have a show, this is what we charge and these are the conditions around that. They sign on short term one day, two day. It can be a few weeks if it's a film because that's a little bit different because we usually get into a collective agreement situation. But often the day calls, calls that only take one day, and the call is just what we call the workday or the work agreement is our call.

So then you get dispatched out by seniority. It's literally everybody in order of your seniority number as long as you're skilled in that field. So for a hand you start at number one, you call number one, are you available to work tomorrow? Number two, are you available? And you just go on and on. We have 350 members. You do get to the end of that list when it's busy, and then we move on to 'permites' who are people who would like to become IATSE members or have just started. Some of them maybe are a friend of a friend, but they could help out that day, and that also happens. It does when you're serving as president, for me it made sense because my job was to be the union rep for people. So when they were dispatched to the job and it was maybe a mistake, then it was my job as their rep to come to the business agent who's the one who is in charge of either dispatching the workers or is in charge of the dispatchers who dispatch the workers. So we could chat it out, talk it out and make sure the rules were followed, because we have constitutional rules and bylaws that govern this and there are also laws beyond that.

We want to make sure that we're serving our members best. But it is a constant struggle. It's getting into people's minds that yes, we have to run businesslike in many ways because we are bidding on jobs but we also have to be a union and represent our workers and ensure that they're getting good working conditions. Those things do clash at times. If you have a strong leadership or clear rules you can work through that. It can be triumphant at times because you get to dispatch workers to these great jobs what they want to do, and it can be difficult at other times because you have to make calls, like judgment calls. We all know all the rules in the world, there'll always be a gray area. So we try and serve the members better.

So seniority: most IATSE members will be able to tell you, I'm number 170. Everybody knows their seniority number because that's how you know whether you're going to get work. We do ins and outs on the stage side for all the big concerts. Then the show calls, you know that show call probably won't go below 60 on this one. So it's just something that is quite common culture that we understand. We have, you can see a line in our seniority list. The most senior female is not in the top 10 and that's because IATSE, like our local, this is a local issue, is we didn't let women into our union until 1970. It wasn't an active decision to cut women out, it just was primarily, I don't believe it to be an active decision, it was just primarily it was jobs that men did. The jobs that women did, which

were the wardrobe or makeup jobs, were dispatched to their wives by their husbands' seniority. So once it's changed and they were letting women into the union, it also caused problems. Now all of a sudden you have some women who are full members; they have a seniority number. But then, you have all these women who have been doing that job without a seniority number because they've been working off the old system, which was their husband's number 2 - so I'm the second one to get called. So it was an interesting transition. I wasn't around for it but to hear the stories of how that worked. Most of them were positive of it, just the way it was and it was accepted. The first female got in not because she was doing female work *per se*. It was because she was a very talented follow spot operator and they had a show and they needed another super trouper operator and she said, "sure if I can get my membership." So it was because of her, because she wasn't going to help them out until she got something in return. She had been working but was kind of on the outside and would never be a member. So she broke the barrier and we're all thankful for it.

Of course times have changed and nobody's spouse gets any sort of seniority, of course it's just the worker. So how it's changed for women is in Edmonton and the Edmonton area we have a lot of mixture of male female on every job and every position. Although number wise, there were probably more females in the more traditional female jobs as wardrobe and makeup. There's quite a mix. There are lots of females who do lighting and stage carpentry, but there are still times when I've been on a call and I'm the only female. It's usually a job that is more physical and other females just haven't taken. It's not because I was the most senior, it's just the way the cards fell. So there are times when you are the only female on a jobsite.

My experience, and I think it is my personal experience because I have heard stories that people don't feel the same, is that there isn't, I'm not judged because I'm female. If I could do the work it didn't matter. I'm strong, I'm tall, so there wasn't limitations with moving. Mostly it was with steel calls, which is putting together the steel stages, so the trusses are extremely heavy. So I didn't struggle with that and I think that's partly why I didn't have issues, because I could pick up my end. I know some of the big calls of some of the outdoor concerts and you end up being the only female, you just hope you're not the weakest person. As long as you're not at the bottom, nobody would notice. But that said, by even having this conversation, I recognize that it was noticed that I was the only female. So that in itself - whether it's an issue - but it's something that we have to recognize and try to adapt. In the film industry there's males and females, but there's a significant higher number of males. There are lots of articles that have been coming out with why, like why in the backstage professions, and even in professions out of our scope such as directors, producers, line producers, all of those jobs, why are there not females in these jobs? It's not because females are not talented, but what is it about the industry that is not attractive to females? It doesn't matter what job you're in, if there's inequality, if the worksite isn't reflective of society, then I think we can ask the question, where's the disconnect? What can we do to improve it?

I think questions that can be asked on the film side, part of it is it's a culture of hiring your buddy. Sometimes that's all it is, they just don't know you, they hired their buddies,

and they ended up being male. I often would work in the grip department or lighting department, and maybe have one or maybe two females, but there's not a lot of females in those departments. Wardrobe again will have a lot more women; it's usually maybe unusual that there are lots of males in that department. And makeup: my experience has been there's been quite a mix.

So what is it about this job, what is it about this industry? It's a very difficult industry on family. It's an extremely intense process, because when you do a show there's nothing else. There's no such thing as calling in sick, there's no such thing as having to leave a job a couple hours early because maybe you have a child, maybe you have a parent, maybe you have family members that you take care of. We can look at the statistics and know that females still do percentage wise they do more of that work. They may have a bigger pull of outside of paid work that males don't experience, maybe that's what it is. Maybe it's just the hours, because film work often is a minimum of 12 hours a day and can be 17 hours a day. Back to back I tell you it's intense hours. So if you have children it makes it nearly impossible. I know my decision to have a child, when we decided that it was, I may not go back to film. I might but I might not, because do you have a child so that you only work or do you have a child so that you can also spend time with them? Everybody needs to decide that for themselves, and my decision was that I would like to spend time. So when we had our daughter I decided that I would take a year off work. Let's be clear, that was a year off of paid work, because her first union meeting she was five weeks old, so I still did all of my work on the board, my executive board work. But as we all know, that's just the other stuff. So to take a big chunk of time out has many effects when you work in a culture of you getting jobs because you're around because I know who you are. So when you take yourself out of the equation for a year people don't know that you're back on, so it was very difficult to go back to work. Some people didn't even know why I was gone; some people didn't know I was taking calls again - oh you're back at work! So it took time. Then you also get replaced. I worked in the props department in film and television, so we had kind of the same crew. So yes, our employment was this show then that show shuts down so your employment ends, and then the next show comes up and the calls go through. But it was often the same people in a similar mix. We're a small enough town that the makeup show to show, the makeup of the group was fairly similar.

I was the on-set props person. So when I left they had to find someone else to fill that, because there were not loads of people who did that job, because we're a small town in terms of the film industry. So I left and I was replaced - and I was replaced by someone fantastic. She was great at the job. But then I want to come back to work, well then what happens to her, because now she's the person who's been doing that job and building those relationships, and now there's no place for you. So my first job back after being pregnant was actually in a different department that I hadn't been working in, and that was because they needed someone and I had a lot of wardrobe experience. So it was difficult and I really missed working in the props department. But it was nobody's fault; it's just that is the system and you understand. You get a team together that works well together, the next time a show comes you want that same team. This is very intense work, you rely a lot on your coworkers, so you want a strong environment. You don't want to just throw someone out nor did I want to go back then after this person making it to this

position them not to have employment. So it was a struggle. So then you kind of ask, what do you really want to do?

Q: But the person who replaced you didn't replace you on the seniority list.

SV: Those jobs are not by seniority. Sorry, there are jobs that, with IATSE they're what we call 'name call.' Jobs that are either, you're the first in the department, second in the department, or you have a defined job – those are all name hires. So you're right, seniority wise the job was mine. But when you get into a situation where it's not a seniority situation, it's more nuanced. Not that I even wanted to go back, there's also that complication. You have a child - do I want to be working 90 hours a week? I'm not sure. Where you can't have any other choice. You don't get sick, you don't take time off, it's very unusual.

Q: Is there something wrong with the industry that it should be that kind of culture?

SV: There's a saying and I believe where I heard it is one of the locals out of California, because we're an international union. We say it sarcastically, but we're the only trade union fighting for a 16-hour day. There are many truths to it, because you're right, there's a lot of work standards, like job standards, that we accept are going to be broken. We all know the law says that you can turn down overtime; so an eight-hour day. But we also know that your employment is defined by the start and end of the show, so if you only want to work six weeks go ahead and maybe make an issue of it, but we accept that. There's also a part of it that is creativity. Some of it is correct and some of it is an excuse. This is a creative process; we need to go through the process like this, so we accept certain things. Health and safety is a great example, because it's not only an expensive process to stop to say we can't film because a set is unsafe, because we're often on location and you do a show and it's supposed to look rough and tumble. Guess what! Abandoned buildings look rough and tumble, and those are not always safe. But when your employment is not guaranteed, so to raise that kind of question you're really putting yourself out on the line.

I'm proud to say that my brothers and sisters at IATSE would often group together and say, we need to stand up and talk about this. Sometimes it was, did you get an asbestos inspection before we came, if it's a certain type of building. Or was this ever inspected, because there's evidence that there are mice living in the building. So often that did happen. But it is an industry where maybe we accept rules not being followed or standards not being followed because we are in it together to make a creative product. It is a struggle. I remember being told a story when I was at the Banff Centre of the Arts. It was the designer, and she was telling all of the people - the students, they're like summer students, apprentices, those kind of different levels of learning. She was explaining to them that they shouldn't get caught up on how much they get paid, because they get to create, and that's wonderful. I struggled with that. When you're, I'm looking at these people going, these are crafts people. Yes they're creating and yes they're artists, but they're creating your art. For you to get your art you need to pay these people reasonable wage. It's a culture of having to tell people that yes we're lucky enough to get to do what

we love, but we're also worth being paid for that and having a certain standard. So I think IATSE has been extremely successful in educating the members that just because you get to do what you like doesn't mean you have to accept unsafe working conditions.

Q: How did you work out the work-life balance?

SV: I'm happily married and my husband is extremely supportive. Our daughter is 3-1/2 now and it's a constant struggle. Having my husband so that we can have those conversations and have those discussions to figure it out, to choose to go forward in this job as secretary treasurer, we knew that: one, we knew that we didn't know what the schedule was going to be, but we did know that there would be evening commitments, weekend commitments, travel commitments, and also a certain amount of if something is going on, it's not like some jobs where you can just be easily replaced so you can go home and deal with things. So we made the decision that my husband stayed at home, so that we could balance, until we figured out what the job was, then we could figure out how he could go back to work.

I don't know if that's the solution, because what we've taken is the patriarchal model and we've just switched it. Is that the modern family? I don't know if it is. So it's working for us but I know that my husband has to take on all the roles of someone who's at home has to take on. That's just how it is. There are weeks when I work every evening and then you get home and you have a little bit of time with Maraid and then that's it. Someone has to do the laundry and take care of the bills and run the errands, so it works for us that we're doing it this way. But I think there is a better way, I'm not sure what it is. Working at the AFL you're working with a bunch of people who know that you are going to have outside of work pulls and commitments and that you have a right to them and you should balance that. So there's that respect and there's that understanding, and I'm still struggling with the balance. So what happens to those people who are in jobs that they don't have that support? I don't know how people would struggle with that, where you're constantly embarrassed maybe to have to say, "but I'm a mom and I need to go." It is a struggle and you don't want to be defined by any one thing. We are people, we are all of these things, and I think the labour movement is about accepting that we need to be all of these things. You can't be all of those things if you have to be at work at every moment of every day.

Q: It sounds like the same struggle occurred when you were working as an IATSE member.

SV: After I had Maraid, I took a full year off of paid work, and then I went back part time for six months. So I took calls here and there, but we also were struggling with childcare, which is a whole other conversation about quality childcare. So I worked part time; so, that I knew a couple other female stagehands with young families, so we did 'switcheroos'. This concert's happening this Wednesday, I'm not going to take it, you can take it, so I'll take all the kids. So it works to a certain extent but it's also in the big picture nobody should have to do that. Nobody should have to turn down work because they can't find somewhere to put their kids. But that was what it was. I was in a situation that I didn't have to be the primary income, so that worked. But we made a lot of sacrifices for

that to work. I think the standard of living now does require two incomes, so we just make it work with one income. It's only because I have a good job, but it's difficult for most families to do. Again, I was able to do it but I don't expect anybody else to be able to fit into that same formula, because it's hard. I then made the decision that I needed to go to a job that was maybe more stable. So just the way things happened, timing is everything and especially in the industry I came from, because there are very few jobs that are in a more stable department.

So I had a friend who was the technical director at the Arts Barns, and she had asked me to fill in for her. Well that's great, technical director is actually pretty close to a 9 to 5 job. You have to be there for shows, but it's a schedule. So this is something I can do because now I know I need childcare from 9 to 5. That's the other thing – we work shows, we work evenings, we work weekends. Finding a daycare that doesn't work 9 to 5 is quite difficult, or outside of it, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. But there's no daycare I could find where they would do evenings. What do people on shift work do? It just brought up all these issues of like, the model of having someone able to stay home works for the child if you don't have a system that provides childcare. So let's provide childcare, because you have to have two people working in order to survive at a living standard that's acceptable. So now we need to address that and address it in a meaningful way. Handing me, I think I get my \$100 cheque a month; it's almost insulting. I'm like, 'wow', I don't even really want to cash it because it doesn't make any sense that you think I could provide value, that I could provide a good childcare at that price. So it is a struggle.

We were lucky, we found a not-for-profit childcare that was fantastic. So she's still in there and we are so happy. It's very well run and the kids are happy. There's colour and there's play, exactly what childcare should be. But that's not everybody's experience. So it was always a struggle, so I've been taking more stable work. So from that technical director job, I went to the technical director job at the Winspear. I took myself out of the ups and downs of the film industry. I took myself outside of the ups and downs of being on the call list, because these were more stable jobs. It was really the stars all aligning because there's only a handful of these jobs and those people had to leave and I had to be available, and it just worked out. It would've been hard to plan it that way, it's just that it worked out well. So I left the Winspear job and came to this job, so in some ways I felt I left the film industry or the stage technician industry a while ago. A lot of that had to do with balancing family and work.

Q: You came to the Federation at an auspicious time. What do you see yourself and the Federation facing?

SV: I think there's a - when we were talking earlier about thinking that unions are an exception if you come from a family like that - I think in Alberta, we have a culture that the standards that are in unions are not the life standards that other people will enjoy. But I think that's going now beyond work. It's going to pensions, it's going to healthcare, and there's just this movement of - and I think we're heavily influenced by the States - so as a republic they really believe you take care of yourself. So that kind of, the law and even the practices behind that, are seeping north.

So although the numbers show that Canadians believe that everybody has a right to healthcare, we have to educate that that's the same story when we talk about pensions. Everybody deserves to retire with dignity and the healthcare model is a fantastic model of a cost-effective way to take care of everybody. So CPP: if we expand it, we have a cost-effective way to take care of everybody. But we have these heavy influences that are telling us otherwise. As the Federation, we have to be fighting back. It's a lot of education. It's not that it's being educated from the other side, but it's the commercials on the news constantly. So at least we're not that bad. We might not have pensions, but at least we have healthcare, because in the States we're watching a big mess. So at least it's not that bad. But I don't think that's good; I think we can do better. We have done better historically. What I've seen, talk about trial by fire, since I've been in we've had Bill 45 and 46 come down the pipeline.

We've had this attack on our public pensions. By attacking the public pensions it's just the beginning of breaking people's expectation that retirement is a responsibility for society. Yes, it's only attacking the pension because RRSPs better - but it's not. We have to think of the fundamental belief that's being attacked, and that fundamental belief is that we need to take care of each other. I think that's what the labour movement has been very successful at and has been successful at it whether it's health and safety, whether it's environment, whether it's women, young workers. This is education, so all of these items we have to keep our eye on. Unfortunately there's always limited resources, and so what we've been doing is we've been dealing with the big ones that are coming at us because you can't ignore it. I think we need to continue to do that work but we need to find a way to make sure we don't forget about those other things, because sometimes when you're not paying attention is when the changes happen.

Not that it has happened. I think the labour movement in Alberta is very strong. The leaders are fantastic and they're educated and they share. They share the information so we can, because our power is the people so we need to stick together. But it's hard to watch because it does affect maybe young workers more, is what you always hear. But it also affects seniors more and it also affects people who are of a visible minority more. So there's many people affected in many different ways, and we have to improve all of that. That's why every now and then you sit down and go, what is my job? It's daunting, but I can't imagine not fighting. That's why I was ready to transition out of the arts. I love the arts and I think the arts cure and I think the arts educate, and I think my work that I was doing with my union led me to believe that I could be more effective if I continued with the union work more. I think this is an extension of that work in the labour movement, so I feel honoured. I miss it, I miss it greatly, but I also think we're doing such great work and we can't let our guard down.

Q: What does the secretary treasurer do?

SV: What does the secretary treasurer do?

Q: There's the vision of the secretary treasurer sitting there taking in money and writing cheques.

SV: It was interesting, because when I was running for election, one of the questions that I got asked was, "was I good with numbers." It's a fair question because you're right - treasurer is in the title. I happen to be good at numbers. I wouldn't want to be someone's accountant, that's not the training I have. But my answer to the question was, well yes I am, but I have a feeling that we have staff that would take care of that. I need to oversee it. You're more of a manager position in terms of arms length. The financial administrator takes care of the books. We have an auditor to make sure that everything is working well. We have an accountant we can rely on if something comes up that's maybe a change in policy. We need to use experts in their field, and I ensure that things get the green stamp or get the red stamp, so that's more the financial part of it. I've had this conversation with many leaders of them saying, maybe the title doesn't work anymore. I'm not saying all secretary treasurers have taken the stance I have, which is we have two officers in the AFL and I'm the second officer. Although a part of my portfolio is the administration, the financial side and the running of the AFL's office and maybe more of those tactile things, we only have two officers and it's impossible that our president does everything. So I believe that there's a lot of that portfolio that exists as well. Also it's kind of a job that as long as you're taking care of stuff you get the opportunity to say, that's a file that I think is really important, I'd like to play a part in it. So maybe a vice president title is best, but then it's just a title because the reality is it's two officers, it's a smaller organization, so you just have to do the work. We just moved so I kind of was the interior designer; that was never explained to me when I ran for the job. You just have to look, see what needs to be done, and do it.

Q: Say a few words about Gus Bottas

SV: One of my favourite memories of one of the early meetings, there wouldn't be a lot of people at the IATSE meeting, but when you're new you go and you get this impression. You're looking around going, "wow, all of these people have been here forever." At the front of the room and he always sat to the side, was Gus Bottas. Often there'd be discussion on a motion or just discussion on anything on the floor, because there was always lots of discussion. Gus always followed the rules that other union meetings that I've been a part of follow, which is you stand when you speak. But we never did that. So Gus would stand and the room would get quiet and everybody would look and we'd all listen. He has such historical knowledge and institutional knowledge, and he was part of our international, and he was part of IATSE and he was part of IATSE before it was amalgamated, when we lost all of the projectionists in Alberta. So he has seen so much. We do have collective agreements with certain buildings, and he's been a part of it before those collective agreements existed, so he's seen this transition. So he would stand and we would listen and he would speak, then we would get back to the chaos of the meeting. He still does that to this day. He attends fewer meetings because he gets to take more holidays and enjoy his retirement. He's an important part of our local. His picture of him and his wife is actually on the wall of our office, because he's a member that's been there

for so long and has been an important part. He's served most positions I think on our board at one time or another so it's just hard to imagine things without Gus.

Q: How do you work a pension plan in that type of work?

SV: Well yes! So, we have, in IATSE it's wonderful. Our Canadian office takes care of, so we're kind of like, yes we're an international, but because in Canada we represent only maybe 20 percent of the membership, we also have laws that are only for us. So we're kind of amongst ourselves. But our Canadian office recognized some people who had strong leadership skills as well as interest in pensions. The person I'm thinking of is Ken out of Vancouver. He was the one who implemented RSPs for our union. That seems like a terrible goal, but pensions weren't possible given how we work, the type of employers we have, not the type of employers but how we work, the employment relationship.

So he [Bottas] started where it's like, well we need to get our members at least saving for retirement. So that's when we started implementing that our locals were getting pension plans collectively. But what he did by doing that is that when you get your rate card from IATSE there's a line that says RSP. So our employers are contributing to our RSP but that's like when you're negotiating and you get them from zero to one; it's a way bigger jump from one to two. To get people to think that these employers in the entertainment industry are also required to contribute to people's retirement was significant and important. So we have all of our locals started to do it themselves. So it was to try and get people going on it. It existed and it helped. It took many years but what they did do, because we do have local autonomy, which sometimes can cause problems if you're trying to implement something good for all if a local is really hesitant just because it's something we're all doing. But retirement is something that everybody was like, how do we do this? Health benefits are the same for IATSE. How do you do that? Is the employer that I work for, for four hours required to give me health benefits for the year? Probably not. So IATSE is the holder of my health benefits plan and IATSE is the, not the holder, that's not the right word. IATSE is the, it is the holder I guess. I'm trying to think what they're called. So I'm under an IATSE health benefits plan, so if I don't work I have the minimum plan just because I'm a member. But if I do work, all of that contributes and then I can go up to whatever income.

We also have people with fulltime jobs and only work with us on the side for a little bit of extra cash or enjoyment or whatever it is. So with retirement it was kind of a similar thing – so which employer pays for it? Well they all pay for it now. We have a national plan with RSPs and by no means is it as good as a pension, but it's not too far off of a defined contribution plan. But what it's meant is we have a very large fund that our trustees of the plan have been able to negotiate a really low administration fee. So if you take a look at two RSP plans, if you go with our national plan because it's such a huge fund, we do a lot better, which is why it's so similar when you're getting into the defined contribution plans, which are often referred to as glorified RSP plans, so that's where we're at. It's great because we think it's important. Our members are going to get to an age, and we hope that you don't have to work until the end of time. Some of our members want to work until the end of time but that's because of a love of the job not because of a, maybe

because of a need as well, but I know that I work along mostly men that are in their 70s but they just don't want to retire, they love the job too much.

Q: Let's talk about health and safety.

SV: When people say the show must go on, that has implications when you're talking about a culture, and a work culture. Some of that has to do - it lends itself when you're talking about health and safety, because you're just going to do it, because you're not going to be late for opening night, you're not going to miss that deadline. We deal with a lot of products that other industries use all the time, so they have very strict health and safety rules around it. We're only using it once, we're only using it for this thing, although sometimes that makes it safer in terms of your exposure. But it doesn't make the product safe and it doesn't make your conditions safe.

You just have to go to theatres anywhere and go in the back stairwell and you will see spray paint everywhere because they've taken a prop, just gone back and sprayed it. They probably weren't wearing gloves, they wouldn't have been wearing a mask, and they're not in a ventilated area. But it's better than doing it backstage where everybody is. So there's been a journey so that people accept that, yes the show must go on, but not at all costs. We're dealing with some very dangerous elements, especially as technology changes. The old school sets, the fly rail and the scenery, well that's all a counterweight system and that system has to work and all the pieces have to work and the rigging has to be safe. If something falls, someone gets hurt. That one's the more obvious. But then there's also the less obvious about shoes. Now you have wardrobe people repairing shoes with some of the tools cobblers used, and I think we can look at that trade and see what some of the people who were at the end of their career and the cancers from the exposure of these glues and paints and stains and go, well there's a health and safety issue we also need to be paying attention to. Then one of my favourite things that happens - and I mean my favourite, because it just makes you laugh and cry at the same time - is if we mix these two products together it makes this really neat effect on this wall and it looks fantastic.

Now the MSDS sheet never says if you mix these two products together what is off-gassing, what is happening? We all do it. I'm 36 and I remember you would take a hot knife and carve Styrofoam, because you got a nice smooth line and it made it quite a bit easier than not using heat. You shouldn't melt Styrofoam, but we did it because it looked good and that's what you wanted. But there is a movement to change that. There are people who tour talking about health and safety in the stage and the importance of it. You just have to turn on the news to know outdoor stages are engineered, but they have to be built, because they're put up and down, but every single time they're put up they have to be built the way the engineers intended it to be built. We've seen deaths, whether it's in the States and Canada, and that's hard. You get into fault and you get into blame, but it's an industry that needs to be fixed. It's changing and it's changing a lot. I have a Facebook page that I'm a part of and it's called "You Know You're a Stage Hand If."

The majority of the discussions are someone will put a picture on of don't do this with your piece of rigging or don't do this. It's an education that we need to tell everybody. It's sometimes a difficult industry because you need to know a little bit about everything. You need to know how to solder, you need to know how to use the table saw, you need to know how to sew. So you end up, how do you be a master at everything? Well that's going to take a lot of time. So now maybe you're in a category of being new at your job until you're in your 50's, so that's a long time to be vulnerable to health and safety issues. I do think the energy is moving, but it's also hard because when you're in precarious work that could end, you don't want to be known as someone who always complains, because then you just think you're never going to get the next gig, then what are you going to do? But once you get hurt, then you should have said something, is not a formula that we should be following. How we fix that is we're unionized so that you don't have to stand up and say, that's unsafe. We can stand up and say, that's unsafe. So it's helpful. But it's also educating young people and people new to our industry that yes, they're yelling at you and you know the curtain's on and the rehearsal's coming and the stars are coming and you need to do this. But you need to do it safely, and we all have to look out for each other.

Q: What does it actually feel like to be a precarious worker, literally not knowing what your job is going to be tomorrow?

SV: Both film and stage work is both precarious. Even the Citadel years that I did, which would've been more stable of a job; there's no guarantee season to season. We're protected a little bit under the collective agreement, but there's no guarantee. Sometimes it's, I hope that person likes me so they hire me back. You work a commercial for two days and maybe it went rough and something wasn't exactly your fault but you had a disagreement then you go, I'm never going to work with that company again. Sometimes it's good because let's be honest, all of us have had days where you wish you didn't work somewhere. So I think the type of person that is attracted to this type of work is maybe someone who isn't attracted to a fulltime 9 to 5 job. So there's a bit of that. For the most part, people have a personality that they kind of like that, they like the unknown. But there's also a terrifying feeling, especially when you come out of college and you just go, now what? So you call everybody and you know that you graduated with a class of 18 people, and you know that the Fringe is hiring eight people. So the math doesn't work out, so you just hope that you're one of the people that gets picked. Yes sometimes it's because of your skills, but often we're coming out and chances are we're fairly equal. So then what's that that sets you aside? It makes it difficult for financial planning. When they talk about retirement savings, if you don't know where your next job is - I'm sorry, the idea of putting money into savings is not happening. I know when my next rent cheque is due.

So we struggle and it goes in waves of also how you live. You go through the wave of being able to afford to go out to restaurants and not worrying about stuff and then you go through the wave of, oh my goodness, I'm glad I bought that big bag of rice and that's what we're going to live on. There's also a stress of at work on how you act. How do you act in a job when you know that this job will end and that chances are these are the

people who are going to make the decision whether you get the next job. So maybe I won't say that that bothers me, maybe I won't say that I didn't think that was unsafe, maybe I won't say that that should change. I think a lot of people that does happen. So that's also not a straight environment to be working in, because that kind of fear and self imposed fear, self imposed but also because of the structure, so it's environmentally imposed I suppose, is hard to live around. But that said, the thrill of it and when you get past that beginning part of your career and you trust that there is enough work out there, then it doesn't bother you anymore. You speak to other people and they're like, you don't know where you're working next week. You're like, yes but something will turn up. But that takes a while to get to. Then I started again from zero because once I took a year off from having a child I felt like I was out of contact again with all your contacts, and you have to rebuild that again. But yes, it's a precarious place but that I think sometimes attracts people to the job and it detracts people from the job.

Q: Are there things we can be learning from the IATSE model? One thing that occurred to me was the idea of an IATSE house; that there's this space that is always staffed through the IATSE system, and the individual show comes in and out, but there's a stability to that physical workplace. Is that something that could be useful?

SV: I think it is useful, not only because the employer ends up with a certain amount of stability because, yes, today they need five employees and tomorrow they're going to need 70 employees. That is a difficult model, so IATSE fills a need for that. We have all these people and we can divvy them around as needed, and there's that. The other part of it is you end up with skilled workers. Yes, maybe for you in your - like in this one house, you may have only done eight hours, but this is your fulltime job. So you end up being a skilled worker without having a workplace, and there's great value to that. I know in Edmonton because we have such a great membership and a large portion of them are not only educated, whether it's in theatre school or film school, they also have this as a full-time job. So when we have a show come in, like a touring show, one of those big shows comes in and has 15 trucks that needs to be unloaded, they go to some venues where there isn't a workforce that does this for a living.

As you can understand, there's a certain way you explain a job to someone who doesn't know what the equipment is called, doesn't know how it goes together. But when they come to our venue, and it's many big cities across the country are the same because they have a large call sheet of skilled workers, so they come to our venue, they don't need to explain the little things. We know how this goes together. We don't know how you want it to be put together, but you give us a little bit of direction and you don't have to explain absolutely everything. We're not trained monkeys, we're skilled people with departmental experience, but also industry experience, and that changes how quickly they can put up the show and how safely. That part of the model of IATSE works fantastic. It also gives you a lot more job satisfaction. Yes it's show business, so sometimes it's easy because people want to come out and help. But these are skilled jobs and highly skilled jobs, and that's sometimes hard to explain when people think you push a box. But you also have to open that box knowing where all the equipment is and where it's going, and understand the lingo. So that's one of the lower skilled jobs we have but it's still a skilled job.

Q: There's a really important link to get made about how IATSE operates; that it's transportable to other workplaces to allow that kind of independent skilled person to still have access to some of the rights and benefits of the union movement.

SV: Yes. And also it gives - what's great when we're working with an employer to maybe expand our jurisdiction, or to maybe even just get a jurisdiction to exist with the new employer, is that's what we can offer them. They don't have the mechanism to offer benefits that they can afford, but us as 14,000 members across Canada have fairly affordable benefits. You just have to pay your portion of it. So it's an easier buy in from employers, and so then also it means as a union we can set a standard, we can set a reasonable standard that is possible.

Yes we have this dichotomy of some of our employers make millions and millions of dollars and the other employers are hoping to get a \$5,000 grant so they can get the show on. So you have to deal with them differently, but we have a standard of rules that applies to all of them, and that's around health and safety and you have to contribute to our health plan and you have to contribute to retirement plans and you have to make sure that your CPP is paid and EI is paid. That's easy for someone who has a normal job, but we come from freelance so that's not the standard. Say you get paid \$20 an hour, so you get paid \$20 an hour as a freelance person. That's nowhere near \$20 an hour, because once you take off all the [deductions], whether it's your EI, your WCB payments, all of that, you take that off, you actually are working for much less. People are surprised by that. There are still departments within our industry that are working as freelance and don't realize that maybe, until they do taxes or maybe until they're more experienced that what they're actually getting paid isn't as good as it sounds. So there's a lot of education going on about that. I know out of Vancouver they have a huge campaign for FX workers for special effects, because they work as independent contractors, they're given a lump sum to do work. So what they've been working with them is, we'll break it down, so eight hours of straight time so those next four hours are time and a half and the four hours after that are double time. So now what were you actually getting paid once you take all of your deductions away? It's not much. So with it being through IATSE we can set that standard, and then we can also get paid a decent living but also give a tool to these smaller organizations to be a part of being a decent employer and still getting their product out.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

SV: No. I feel like I've been talking for days.

[END]