

Lisa Rose

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk, Don Bouzek Camera: Don Bouzek

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LR: I work at Suncor in the ENI department, extraction. My job is instrumentation technician.

Q: Tell us about your background.

LR: I forgot to say that I'm on the women's committee for the union, UNA 707A. Okay so my family came to Fort McMurray about 1983. I came here and had to do my grade 12 that first year here with a bunch of strangers, and graduated with a bunch of strangers. I was very lonely that year and I took on a job working at Muffy's Donuts, so I kept busy that way. I went back to Newfoundland for one more year. I did business education, came back up here again with my family. All of this happened with my family back and forth. Over the years I've worked as a security guard for a long time, I've been an EMT, I've been a librarian, I've been a sandwich artist at Subway, I've been a labourer. I started at Suncor in the mine, and I operated the heavy hauler trucks, I operated the big graders. Then I went to the steam bay and I washed the big trucks. From there I took my apprenticeship as instrumentation technician and did my four years, and now I've been a journeyman for about three years.

Q: What was your family background?

LR: Unreligious. We went to church for funerals and marriages and Christmas periodically. Oh gosh, what was your other question?

Q: What kind of political background?

LR: No political.

Q: They weren't tied to the Conservative party?

LR: No parties, no nothing. When I was young, I don't recall anything about voting. I remember when I was in grade 11, I went with my friends and we found out that we would get free beer at the celebration if we helped the NDP party. Actually I probably shouldn't be saying this. We wanted to do the after-party, but what we did is we went door to door and we gave out pamphlets and stuff like that to help the politicians.

Q: Did your family have a negative attitude toward unionization?

LR: No, I don't even remember any talk of there being a union when I was young. I didn't really know anything about the union until I started with Suncor. My father worked

for a brewery in Newfoundland that had closed down, and I really don't know if it was even a union. I have no idea.

Q: So when you came to Fort McMurray, you were already in high school. Was there some difficulty due to the fact that you came from Newfoundland and had that kind of accent and different cultural ways?

LR: It was a little different. I didn't make a lot of friends my first year. I did at work, but not at school. I made a couple of really close friends, and they were fantastic, and that's all I needed.

Q: Do you have any good or bad memories about any of your previous jobs, such as the one as security guard?

LR: No, not really. I recall when I went down to the family housing one night to dissipate a party that had taken place after the bar. There was about 40 people or so all around, and I was pretty nervous when I had to deal with that. I got a little bit of flak back and people yelling at me and saying things, but it wasn't too bad. It did make me very nervous though, and they did leave.

Q: What do you remember about Fort McMurray when you arrived? What sort of community was it at that time?

LR: It was small; it was friendly. When you went to the stores there were lots of things on the shelves; you never had to worry about things not being there. I found that people were a lot more friendly back then, kinder. Now I find Fort McMurray is very rushed, everybody's in a hurry to get everywhere. Traffic is crazy here, people don't follow the rules of the road. They don't use their signals, which is my pet peeve. But es, life was nice and easy and slow back then. We had lots of trails that we could go in and things, and a lot of it is missing now.

Q: But you generally responded favorably to Fort McMurray though?

LR: The first year, no. I was not happy the first year; it was just school and work. I didn't want to be here. I was away from all my friends. If I could've gone back, I would've. ... I knew that was going to happen. Cut. Okay let me bring myself back.

Q: I'm interested in family background, because some people, like myself, went down a road that was entirely opposite to their upbringing.

LR: As kids, well I believe my brother, I remember going with my friends, we were forced to go to church every weekend. I think it's just because my parents wanted some alone time, so their time was us going to church.

Q: As a young woman worker, were you treated okay?

LR: Yes I don't think I had a problem. I guess I was kind of young to be working in the woodworking store, so when people came in they looked at me and they thought, how is she going to know anything? I didn't really know a lot. I had information written down and I would let my uncle know what people were asking for and stuff like that, and then he got a hold of them and they made the deals and stuff like that.

Q: You mentioned that you're on the women's committee.

LR: Yes.

Q: Women's committees usually delve into some of the issues women face in the workplace. But we'll get to that. Talk about coming to work for Suncor. Do you talk to people in Syncrude, who don't have a union, to compare notes? Are you aware of some of the differences?

LR: I just know that if anything goes wrong they don't have anyone to back them up, to help them, to be on their side. It's them against the company. But I don't know, people are pretty happy over there. I think a lot of their wages, because we as a union get our wage increases and stuff like that, that obviously affects the wages of Syncrude. So they end up getting a lot of benefits because of the union, despite the fact that they're not union.

Q: Do they have anything similar to a grievance procedure?

LR: I really don't know. I don't know of anyone that has been in a situation that they would need help. I just know that people have lost their jobs and they didn't really have any defense or anyone to help them. You're kind of at a loss. If you get in trouble, good luck trying to protect yourself. You're defenseless really.

Q: When you first went to work there, did you drive a truck?

LR: I operated a heavy hauler.

Q: Describe what that job was like.

LR: Let's just say you walk into a nice big two-story house that's a big square. You go up to one of the corner rooms at the front, if you're looking at the house, on the front right. You sit in there on a chair and then you start to drive it around. That's exactly what it's like. It's crazy. They're huge; they're so huge. It's like you're in a boat and you're on the ocean and you're rocking along in the boat. I found it very peaceful except for then I hit a pothole and then it was pretty bad. There was one time I hit a pothole and both of my mirrors on either side about this high smashed. So yes, pretty exciting. Potholes are very deceptive. When it's raining and the road is wet, it doesn't look like there's a pothole; you hit it, big pothole.

Q: How fast are you going?

LR: I think we were going about - I recall seeing 40 or 60, but I can't remember. That would've had to have been miles per hour.

Q: When it's loaded, what's the tonnage?

LR: I believe it was between 350 or 450 tons.

Q: What sort of training did you get?

LR: Well I had lots of training on a computer in classroom training before I went out. I actually took the mine operations course at Keeyano College. Back in the day, that would've been about 14 years ago I guess when I took that course, it was about six months long. So we were actually in the classroom for about four months taking many different kinds of courses, then we went onsite. Actually we went to Syncrude, who was a sponsor for the program. We went out there and we were operating the dozers and stuff out there for a couple weeks, then we were on graders and dump trucks at Keeyano College for a couple weeks. Then we actually went out on site and had some training, computer training and things like that. Then they put us on the haulers with other people who were actually operating; we were in the passenger seat. Then after however long when they were ready they let us take over, then it was nerve wracking.

Q: Do you need a license or certificate to operate one of those big trucks?

LR: I believe so. I believe they want to know that you do know how to operate a vehicle. We had to have a clear record, no tickets and things like that on our driving record.

Q: Then you went into the steamer?

LR: In the steam bay. So the steam bay had three levels, and on each level there would be these huge cannons like the firefighters would use, and we would shoot at the trucks with those things. Every now and then a mirror would get knocked off of the truck - it would go flying. Not that I did it; I never did it. Also we had the wand with the hot water and we would actually cut through the mud and the tar sand that was stuck to the trucks underneath under the belly. We had to clean it really well before the mechanics could work on it, or they couldn't even see what they were working on. That was a good job, enjoyed it.

Q: Then you went into instrumentation. What sort of training did you get for that?

LR: It was a four-year program. I had to leave Fort McMurray actually each time that I went to school. School was between I believe it was two or two and a half months each time over a four year period. The hours that we worked, we had to punch in hours for our ticket. That all took place at Suncor and we got moved around to different areas each time. The first time was in the upgrader, so I stayed there for a year and I went to school, and then the second year I went to extraction and then I went to school. The third year I went to the valve shop and then I went to school. Fourth year I came back to the upgrader

and finished up, and then I stayed there for about a year or so I believe. Then I left there and moved on to extraction, and that's where I am now.

Q: What's the upgrader all about? Are they doing something to the bitumen?

LR: Yes.

Q: To make it flow?

LR: It's already pretty separated by then, so we get a lot of actually - it looks like oil. Then they start separating it and sulfur comes out, so it's a pretty yellow green colour. Naphtha comes out, diesel, gas, oil, all these different things all come out of it. They make it more and more pure and then it gets sold.

Q: Is it put into a pipeline at that point?

LR: It is.

Q: And it's shipped to where?

LR: All over the world I think.

Q: So by the time we see oil coming to Edmonton, it's already fairly pure?

LR: As far as I know it's pretty good, yes. It's synthetic, what the Americans like to call dirty oil.

Q: Can you talk a bit about that? Most people don't know much about it.

LR: I don't know a lot about it either, honestly.

Q: What do you think about the hype that's been generated around the idea that up here in this part of the province we're producing dirty oil?

LR: I still honestly don't know what their definition of dirty oil is actually. I do know that it still needs to go through a process south of Fort McMurray, as far as I know, to make it more pure. That's all I know. They don't have the facilities up here to make it perfectly pure, and that's going on in refineries down south. So I'm going to assume, which is not a good word, that it's good to go after that. But we don't have the refinery here, so we're shipping it as good as we can from here. It's going through all the processes.

Q: Do people here get a bit angry about all that hype?

LR: Angry? More than likely, disappointed I think is the big one. We do a great job here. We're pulling the oil out of the dirt, we're doing it as safely as we can. We're separating, we're selling what we can, we're doing what we can, and then we're shipping all of this

oil south and helping whoever wants it. It's so much better to come from Alberta, get your own oil from Alberta for Canada and anybody else that wants it can have it, instead of bringing it across the country, which does not make any sense to me, not across the country, across the ocean. Why would you do it when you have it here in Canada? If you support your own government, your own people, don't you think that it's better? I don't get it. . . . We don't even call it dirty oil – it's oil. It is what it is.

Q: When you're doing these various jobs, did anyone think it strange that a small blonde woman would be doing these jobs that are generally thought of as men's jobs?

LR: I have never looked at my jobs in that light. I look at my jobs as my jobs. Any issues that I've ever had, I accepted the fact that they're my issues and not because I'm a woman. It's like, I have to use the washroom, I can't stand up to pee, so I have to find a washroom. That's just my life and I don't feel it's because I'm a woman, that's just life. It would be nice however, when I was out in the mine, if they had more of the shacks available for facilities, so it wouldn't be so difficult. I know for a fact that a lot of women would keep driving and not go to the washroom like they should, and end up with a lot of bladder infections and things like that, because it's very unhealthy to hold it in. So, that part of it I didn't like.

Q: Did you ever run into any discrimination?

LR: I did have one situation one time where, and I don't really know if it's because I was a woman. I used to be quite a bit heavier and I was walking somewhere with a couple of the other journeymen. One of our pickup trucks came by and asked us if we wanted a ride. The fellow that was driving said to me, you need to walk; I'll pick up these guys and you can walk. He did, he did. I was very disgusted and very angry and bitter for quite some time because of that. I was disgusted. That was uncalled for.

Q: On the women's committee, do you take up some of those kinds of issues?

LR: We take up issues as a whole. When things come onto our plate - for example, the aboriginal women that are missing in Alberta, we're beginning to discuss that. It hasn't gone very far yet but we're getting more and more information and as a group we're going to be sponsoring dealing with it. We're going to do whatever we can to try to help, maybe even go for some meetings or something down south. When we find out what we can do about it we're going to definitely do something about it.

Q: In terms of treatment of women generally at Suncor, there's very little gender discrimination?

LR: Different women come across different situations, yes.

Q: But there's no official gender discrimination? You're not being paid less than a man?

LR: Oh no, no, not at all.

Q: What sorts of issues are women facing?

LR: I know that some women are facing issues when it comes to their strength, especially when they're taking on men's jobs. For example, pipefitting – they can't lift certain things; they can't lift grinders. In my situation I deal with drills and things like that, big wrenches, pipe wrenches and things like that. I'm very strong, I don't mind admitting that I am strong. Periodically I have to step in with fellow workers who are not women, and I do have to do it. So - yeah me! So yes, personally I feel very strong and competent in my physical ability to do my job.

Q: Has the company made efforts to ensure that the work process is organized in such a way that women can do the work?

LR: I guess sometimes, depending on the situation, if people aren't physically able to do something, and there's always that situation is going to happen. It could be men or women really. If physically it can't be done, then I feel that it's the boss's role to place the people in that situation that are able to do that job, or at least two people together that can do that job. If you have two small women and they're being sent out to do a job that is obviously beyond their physical capacity, then shame on that person.

Q: Has the union had to step in at any point to help women out? Is there anything in the union's work that would suggest that they've had to pay attention to the fact that they have women members who may from time to time need protection or special benefits or something like that. Has the union done anything specifically for women?

LR: I know that there's a sexual harassment policy in place, so any time that anyone has any problems there, they have somewhere to go to ask for help. They can get their union steward to help them. They can also go to any other person, especially myself I'm always available too if anyone ever needs any help for any situation that they can't deal with themselves. Usually what we try to do is, we as a union, we try to deal with things with our brothers and sisters first, and if we can't resolve our issues then we need to step it up and either get the union involved or bring it to our supervisor or something like that. But normally we try to keep it within our union, unless of course there's a staff member involved; then obviously the union and the staff have to come together to deal with the situation.

Q: Have there been instances of sexual harassment?

LR: I know there have been. I've never personally been involved. But I do know for a fact that people have lost their jobs because they did things that were inappropriate, and no tolerance for that type of thing.

Q: And the company says no tolerance?

LR: Absolutely, yes. It's basically the same thing as zero tolerance for fighting. It's not acceptable.

Q: What are relations like between the union and the company? Do you have 5,000 grievances lined up?

LR: Actually I don't think the grievances are that high. I feel that, periodically, when there is a situation that needs to be dealt with, a lot of grievances go in because so many of the union members are not happy with what's going on, that all the people put in a grievance. For example, if there's a supervisor who is not treating our members properly, disrespecting or just overall generally not a good supervisor or just doesn't know how to treat his people, a number of people will put in grievances. A lot of times people will put in requests for transfer just to get away from a bad supervisor. At one point I know in the mine there were at least 40 grievances on one shift because of one supervisor.

Q: What would that supervisor have done? Just spoken disrespectfully?

LR: Just many different things. A lot of it had to do with say if a person was off sick and that person came back, that person was put on a bad piece of equipment instead of the piece of equipment that that person should've been on as before. Usually what happens is you're on the same piece of equipment for a long time. So this person would basically punish someone who came back, because they were disappointed in the fact that you were off sick.

Q: I get the feeling that your members are pretty knowledgeable about their rights.

LR: Yes, we have each other's backs for sure, and good stewards too that you can call on.

Q: How many stewards do you have?

LR: Oh my gosh, I have no idea. Oh gosh, I'm going to say over 30 plus. I'm not positive. You can't quote me on that one.

Q: When did you become a steward?

LR: I'm not a steward.

Q: Why did you decide to get involved with the union, such as being on the women's committee?

LR: Well living in Fort McMurray I wanted to be a permanent resident here, I wanted to set my roots down. So my first step actually is I was doing security, and I decided, okay how am I going to get out to the plants? I decided, how do I get out there? Okay, I would like to work with the mine rescue team. So what I did is I got my EMT, I went to school and worked as an EMT for two years and did security at the same time. After that I decided, okay I think I have that under my belt now. There's a mine ops course, I think

I'm going to take that now. So then I took that course and once we had our interviews with Syncrude and Suncor, Suncor offered me a job. It was a union and I thought, well I never worked for a union before. They were telling us about how if anything happens, if you have a vehicle accident or anything like that, you may need a steward to help you in your defense. So I thought, well that's a great idea. It would be nice to have somebody to help me if things go wrong. Right from there I thought, this is good, I like this. To protect myself – absolutely! I haven't looked back.

Q: Did you ever have to go to the union?

LR: I did go to the union one time. I had a supervisor that wasn't treating me fairly. I had a great steward at the time - her name was Angela Adams - who helped me. We had a meeting, her and myself and the supervisor. Angela spoke for me and told the supervisor exactly what was going on and what was not right and how I felt. Things changed, with Angela's help. It was fantastic.

Q: What other benefits have you noticed from belonging to the union?

LR: A huge financial difference.

Q: How huge?

LR: I don't want to actually discuss that. But when it comes to the union having a contract and with our wages, our contracts are usually three years long. Over the period of three years, we get a percentage of wage increase. Three years in a row we'll get a certain percentage so that it totals the contract wage of what we won or whatever the agreement would be. So I really appreciate the fact that our union is allowing us to get these wage benefits, and also other benefits as well. When it comes to holidays, travel time, we get 24 hours paid travel time.

Q: What's that about?

LR: Basically we are given normally two weeks holidays, if you're a regular employee. I get three weeks, because I've been there for 14 years. But they also give you 24-hour travel time, so you get paid for 24 hours, two days off if you're a 12-hour shift worker, to travel away from Fort McMurray to get out of town.

Q: How often can you claim that?

LR: You get 24 hours every year. So they give that to you freely, and if you don't use it you lose it. So usually what people do is their first trip of the year they say, I'm taking my 24 hours, and adding the rest of their holidays onto that 24 hours. That way you don't lose it. I know that a couple of people have lost their 24 hours because they didn't take advantage of it right away.

Q: What about other benefits?

LR: We have great medical benefits. We have medical and dental, we have extended health, we have travel insurance. It's amazing. We even have extra insurance with the union. If you choose to join, they have their own benefits, and that works really well too. We have a healthcare benefit program where we can put in money from our paycheques, and it's a health spending account and you can put money in there. For example, if you plan on getting say Lasik eye surgery, or something like that, if you put in money from every paycheque into that account, then when you get your eyes done you can take the money out of that account to help pay for it.

Q: A pretty complete list of benefits.

LR: It's pretty good.

Q: What kind of work do you do in instrumentation?

LR: With the processes that go through all the piping that we have at Suncor, we need to keep track of it. So we have equipment that actually calculates the flow of processes going through our piping. We have flow transmitters, we have level transmitters, we have pressure transmitters that all need to be calibrated. So we have calibration equipment to take care of all that. We have radiation equipment that also takes care of any nukes that we have, because those also keep track of the flow and things that are in our piping and processes and tanks. We have analyzers that analyze what we have going through our piping. We have, oh it's vast, I can go on and on.

Q: So what's your role?

LR: The area that I work in is the maintenance department. So, we actually go around and maintain the process equipment.

Q: What are the shifts?

LR: When I first started on the heavy haulers the shift that I had to work on was three days on and, or I'm sorry...

Q: Talk to Winston.

LR: Sorry, I keep automatically looking at the camera. So when I first started on the haul trucks, it was a six on six off shift, so it was three days then three nights. My best friend was working at Syncrude and she was on the same schedule as I was, however it wasn't at the same time. So my first two days off were her last two days off. So when I should've been sleeping. So when I got off of my nightshift I should've been sleeping but I would stay up so that I could hang out with her. We could hang out that evening or whatever and then the next day, and then she would go to work. So it was basically two days a week that we got to hang out. The first day off it was just so tiring, but I wanted to see her and hang out. It was extremely difficult, lack of sleep big time. So one of the issues that you

had brought up was the eating and what it was like actually operating the haul trucks. So you're sitting there for about 12 hours a day. If you were inclined you could get off and go into a little lunch shack that had a washroom facility. Basically you'd be stagnant, doing nothing, sedentary for 12 hours, not to mention on the bus for an hour before and after. So about 14 hours a day you'd be sitting.

So anyway, very easy to gain weight - oh so easy. Depending on what your lifestyle was like, if you wanted to go shopping to get your groceries, if you didn't pick up all your groceries before you started your shift you would basically go home and order pizza when you got home, because you had no food for the next day. So the first couple of years for me it was quite difficult, because that was kind of what I did. I didn't really think about healthy eating, so easily I packed on quite a bit of weight when I was working out in the mine. But now as I look back I see how hard it was on my body to have been eating that way. Nightshift people really need to remember that they have to eat lightly. Heavy meals loaded, like full meals of lasagna, pizza, donairs, these things that are so easy to order and get when you get home, will kill you so quick.

Q: So how did your shifts work?

LR: This is going to be related to the mine though, because it's not what I do now. So when I was working out in the mine the schedule that I was on was six days on six days off. The first three days I would get up about 5:30 in the morning. I would get ready, get all of my food ready, get dressed and everything, and go out and wait for the bus. I'd be standing there waiting for the bus. Back in the day we didn't have any little shelters or anything for us, so we would stand in the cold and wind and rain and snow and stand there for about 10 minutes or so, depending on if the bus was early or late or whatever, and stand out there until about 20 to 7 in the morning. Then we would be on the bus for approximately an hour because it would have to do its full route around before it would even leave Fort McMurray, and then the drive out to Suncor was about 25 minutes long.

Once you get to the gate, then you still have to go across the river and all the way to the mine. So by the time you get on your actual equipment it's about 8 o'clock in the morning. Then you work your 12 hour shift, and when shift change happens about 12 hours later, you have to get back on that bus and another hour to get all the way back home, so you're actually not home until about 9 o'clock at night. So your day starts roughly 5:30 a.m. and ends about 9 p.m. Then if you're lucky you get an hour or so with your family, then back to sleep and start all over again the next day. So that would be three days of that, and on your last day you get home about 9 o'clock at night then you get your sleep or whatever. A lot of people try to stay up as late as they possibly can, because they next day they have to go in for nightshift. They have to be up and awake and ready to go at 6:40 p.m. to get to work for 8 o'clock that night, and then not home until 9 in the morning. So that's very difficult. A lot of people stay up, it's called short change, so you get home about 9 at night and a lot of people stay up until 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, then they sleep all day until they have to get up and back to work again for the nights.

Q: There must be cases where people just can't cope with that. People must fall asleep, or there must be accidents or near misses.

LR: Yes, things have happened, definitely. Heavy haulers have landed up on the big berms. What the berms are, with the big roads, the roads are usually wide enough for three widths of haul trucks so the haul trucks can go past with lots of extra room. Then on the side there are big berms of dirt built to protect anyone should they slip or whatever, if it's muddy or anything like that, and the truck will sit on the berm. Periodically people have fallen asleep and they've landed in the berm.

Q: Have you noticed that having an effect on family life?

LR: Yes, that's why people are very thankful to have those six days off. So they make up for that time. Say if someone had a young family, so little kids – when you get home after working that 12-hour shift, you don't get home until 9 o'clock. Good chances are the kids are asleep. When you get up in the morning the kids are still asleep, you leave the kids are still asleep. You don't get to see your kids for at least three days. When people are working the nightshift, they get home about 9 o'clock in the morning. A lot of times the kids are gone to school already. When they get home from school, if that person is already up they get to see their kids and hopefully have supper with them before they head off to go for nightshift.

Q: Generally, what have you noticed about family life in Fort McMurray? Is it the kind of family life you'd see in Edmonton?

LR: No.

Q: It seems to be the kind of place where families might have problems.

LR: Yes. A lot of times with the economy in Fort McMurray – the high prices of homes, the high prices of everything in Fort McMurray – a lot of people with the money that they make, they have to spend a lot just to buy their homes. So the mortgage payments are crazy. They end up getting people living with them to help pay the mortgage. A lot of people still want to have all their toys; so their quads and skidoos and things like that. They have to work overtime, lots of overtime. So they end up, despite the fact that they're already away from their family as much as they are, they end up having to continue working in order to pay all those bills. So I know in one situation, this fellow who worked very very hard, in one year I know he made about \$300,000. So he worked as much overtime as he could get, every single bit of it, and the next year his wife left him and his child support and everything was extremely, extremely high. So he suffered a lot because of that. It greatly affected how much he had to work the next year, because he had no choice, so that he could make all those payments.

Q: It seems that people don't come to live in Fort McMurray because they think it might be a good place to live. They're here to earn money. They come here because the jobs are here. I don't mean to disparage the value of the life you have, but it seems to be a very

temporary sort of community situation. Talk a bit about the community of Fort McMurray. What is it like to live here?

LR: I think Fort McMurray is great. Fort McMurray has a lot to offer, and I get very upset when I hear people talk down about Fort McMurray. It really bothers me. The money is here and if you want to work you can get a great family life here. You can make a good living here. The money that we make, we are able to leave Fort McMurray and go for good holidays. We can go back where we came from and visit the people that we want to see. A lot of people come here because they know that Fort McMurray has money. They come here with a negative attitude to start with. When they come here all they want is the money, so they don't try to make it home. A number of people have come here, they've talked down about it: there's nothing to do, there's nowhere to go, blah blah blah. It makes me mad; it makes me so mad. We have so many facilities here it's amazing. The community is so giving with all the money that we have. United Way, I'm positive that United Way has the highest donation in all of Canada from Fort McMurray, because we do have that extra money in our pocket that we are able to give freely. Situations where if people lose their homes - if there's a fire or anything like that - people give generously. They donate clothes, furniture, money – it's nonstop. For people to talk down, I don't like it.

Q: But there are so many people here on a temporary basis. That must have an effect on the community.

LR: It does, it does. I feel that a lot of people are here and they just take the money and they go. A lot of the money that is made here in Fort McMurray doesn't come back in to Fort McMurray, so it makes small businesses suffer. A lot of businesses have had to close down because they aren't able to be supported by the local economy. It's too bad. A lot of camp jobs that are around Fort McMurray, the people will come in, they'll stay in camp, they'll receive a place to stay, they'll receive food, and they receive the paycheque, and then they'll leave. So that's not helping Fort McMurray thrive.

Q: How do women cope in such a community? Does it have a higher incidence of problems faced by women?

LR: I'm aware that we have a lot of women in Fort McMurray ... No I'm sorry, we have a lot of men in Fort McMurray and not enough women. I've been told that it's about five women, or five men to one woman in Fort McMurray. A lot of times the men, like for example, I can go into a restaurant with my friends and it's funny, because we might be the only women in there. There are so many men, it's crazy the number of men here. I really advise any single women anywhere, I'm just kidding, come to Fort McMurray. Get yourself a man. There's lots! I'm just joking. But you say, when it comes to problems?

Q: Yes, do women face problems here? Does it have a higher divorce rate? Does your women's committee discuss any of the situations faced by women in Fort McMurray generally?

LR: We actually haven't discussed the divorce rate, but that is a great topic to bring up.

Q: Well you've remained married for how long?

LR: Actually I married my husband just two years ago. So we were together for nine years.

Q: Do you have children?

LR: I do. I have a son, he's 29, and my husband has two children, and they're in their early 20s.

Q: Are the children here in Fort McMurray?

LR: My son is here. He actually operates heavy haulers at Syncrude. My husband's children are down in Sherwood Park down near Edmonton.

Q: What are the priorities for the women's committee?

LR: Oh my gosh, let's see.

Q: You mentioned the missing aboriginal women. What's the issue there?

LR: So in Alberta we have a lot of missing aboriginal women. It's come up. Actually we're going to have to cut, and don't let me talk about that because... So some of the things that we talk about is self defense. We actually had a lady come in and show us some self-defense moves. We spent an evening being entertained by her and she got us all standing up and doing a few different things on protecting ourselves. It was a great deal of fun. We also have taken on organizing Christmas parties for the union. Women, let me think...

Q: When you have something like a Christmas party, do the members respond quite well?

LR: It's not too bad. I find a lot of times perhaps word of mouth is not out enough. I don't know if it's because the people in the mine don't have access to their email or whether or not they check it often enough. Some of us are able to get onto a computer every day at work. Out in the mine the people don't have a computer available because they're in their truck. The only computer they have is a console that deals with their actual job of dropping their loads off and getting loaded by the shovel and whatnot. Pardon me. Let's see. So yes if they had more availability, I think to the information of what the women's committee were doing, then perhaps they would be able to attend the functions and whatnot that we do organize. Myself I also have a couple other jobs and professions that I do. One of the things that I do is teach yoga. So I would actually like to bring that to my women's committee and actually even have an evening of informing ladies all about yoga and getting them involved perhaps, maybe even doing a little bit of practice and doing

some poses for yoga. So that would be fun. I think it could be a good laugh. Women' day is coming up here right away.

Q: Yesterday, right?

LR: Oh, I've missed it. Why did I miss it? Oh yes, because I was busy. Okay, well forget about that comment. Oh gosh, I'm lost for words now. We also had the lighting of the lights, and I was thinking that was the women's, oh gosh, you're going to have to scrap all of this stuff.

Q: But I guess what I was asking about was really how well members do respond. What's the level of social activity in the union?

LR: Well specifically when it comes to the women's committee, we have probably I would say our biggest turnout for the women's committee for one of our meetings was about 12 people - 12 women. We had a fantastic evening that evening. We get to sit around as a group and go over topics of discussion. We go over situations that any woman wants to bring up personally, even if it has to do with childcare. All kinds of topics come up and we go over it. We have people that come in and speak to us regarding say the quadriplegic society, they'll come in and speak with us, so anything that we could do to help the association. We have lots of women from all over site. We have people from the lab, we have electricians, instruments techs, we have people from the mine, we have people from the steam bay, we have people from the radio shop – lots of people, women, come in and they join us. We have opinions, different opinions from different aspects all over Suncor.

Q: Is there a perpetual labour shortage? Is the company always looking for workers?

LR: There is always a revolving door. I feel that people are coming and going all the time, be it leaving Suncor and going to a different company or leaving one role at Suncor and going to another role. There are vacancies continuously, especially out in the mine. There's a lot of discontent. I feel that quite often people, when they are by themselves for a long time, for example sitting in a haul truck, you do a lot of thinking. A lot of times people become bitter, they become unhappy, and they look for happiness elsewhere. They feel that, I need to change my job, this job is no good, when in fact it's not the job, it's the person's mental state. All they need is some change, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a job. The job could be quite satisfying if you give it the opportunity. They end up leaving and they go take another job, the exact same job with a different company, and the exact same situation happens again – mental anguish, mental stress. So it doesn't change. Those people need to get in touch with the fact that it's their happiness that needs to, they need to delve deeper into themselves and find their own happiness.

Q: Does that discontent show up in the community in the way that they spend their hours off the job? Does it show up as social and personal problems in the town of Fort McMurray?

LR: Oh sure. It doesn't happen to everybody, but I'm sure there are a few people out there that feel they need to deal with their own issues, their unhappiness or dissatisfaction, by overdrinking. Some people feel that they want to do drugs or their venting is to do things that could affect their job, which is quite sad actually. Sometimes people end up drinking and driving and getting hurt. So they end up not coming back to work. Or they come back to work and something happens, they get tested positive for a drug test, so they can either lose their job or they go into rehab or they have to sign a paper saying that they're going to stay clean and sober and be willing to have random drug tests for however long a period of time that they agree to. So es, there's a lot of things can happen to people that are not content.

Q: Has the union had to deal with that?

LR: Oh sure.

Q: What does the union have to do?

LR: Well the stewards would get involved. They would try to assist those people in getting help to go to rehab or if they need protection to try to save their job, they need some support to find out the rules, just in general an overall assistance. A lot of times people just don't understand how they can get help. You can take time off if you need to do rehab or whatever and come back and keep your job.

Q: The company wanted to institute a random drug-testing program. Why was that, and what happened to that issue?

LR: The company wanted to have a random drug test where they could basically go to anyone and say, I would like you to take a drug test, with very little cause. Sometimes there'll be a few people in one vehicle and the driver will end up crashing or backing up into something, and depending on who the supervisor is, he'll send everyone to go get a drug and alcohol test, when there's one person driving. Why isn't that person the one being tested? So sometimes it's just uncalled for. So the union fought that and right now we're standing in a place where it's a lot better. Now there has to be cause.

Q: What would constitute cause?

LR: Cause would be say for example a person comes to work and they smell like alcohol. A supervisor can say, yes, I would like you to go for a drug test today. So that person is taken right from that spot, offered their union steward to come and be with them during the entire process of getting a drug and alcohol test. They go to wherever it would be on site and they would proceed in doing the urine test or whatever, the swab test. They're also offered right at the beginning, is there anything that you need to tell me, is there anything that you would like to say or ask for help or anything, so that way the person can say if they are an alcoholic, if they want to admit that they are an alcoholic, that they do need help and proceed from there. They can get professional help that they need.

Q: Is the company willing to go that far?

LR: Yes, the company is.

Q: What role does the union play in that? Is it a union program or a company program?

LR: It's like this, yes. They work together.

Q: So the company argued that they had to be allowed to employ random drug testing for safety purposes, right? So why didn't that argument hold up?

LR: I believe the main reason was human rights. They don't feel that the company is allowed to infringe on a person's human rights to be able to do certain things when they are not working, and for it to be affected and affect your job, to maintain your job and your income and things like that. So the union fought it.

Q: I interviewed one of your top managers ten years ago, and he said that he's a staunch Christian and if he had his way he wouldn't hire anyone who drinks or does drugs at all.

LR: Yes, the world is not perfect. Everyone has their vices, even the people that are quite religious and whatnot. They have their own vices as well. They can say they don't, but in one way or another they do, be it the church. They have to be at the church every single Sunday, it's their vice.

Q: How do you feel about the union getting involved politically?

LR: I can honestly say I don't deal with politics. So I can't really comment.

Q: Has that been raised as an issue in the union?

LR: Not from my standpoint, because any time anything has to do with politics, I don't get involved.

Q: For what reason?

LR: I just have zero interest. I have as much interest in politics really as I do in hockey, which is zero. People say, how can you not be involved in hockey? You're Canadian. I do not have any interest.

Q: And as far as you know, your union doesn't have a political action committee or anything like that?

LR: I don't know. The only political involvement that I have is when it comes to voting people in our union – when it comes to the president, the vice president, the treasurer, those positions. That's where I get involved, because a lot of times I know the people and

I trust the people, and those are the ones that I want to hold those positions. But when it comes to the outside, when it comes to the Liberal party, the NDP party, PC, all that, no I don't.

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

LR: Oh my gosh, I should've really thought more.

Q: Don, do you have any questions? ... What does EMT stand for?

LR: EMT is Emergency Medical Technician. I actually was working on ambulances, working with paramedic and whatnot, dealing with emergencies that people were having. For example, heart attacks or car accidents and whatnot – put them on stretchers and bring them to the hospitals. For the ENI, when I mentioned that, that would be Electrical and Instrumentation. That's the department I'm in at Suncor.

Q: You mentioned that you had to leave town to take the mine ops course. Where were you taking it?

LR: No, that wasn't mine ops actually, that was when I did my actual instrumentation ticket.

Q: Talk a bit about that course.

LR: When I took my instrumentation schooling, the first year I went to NAIT down in Edmonton. I really enjoyed it; I liked being in the big city. The schooling for instrumentation is not here in Fort McMurray, so I had to leave. The second year, I went to Red Deer and quite enjoyed it there. I felt that I wanted to travel around Alberta while I was doing my schooling, because I hadn't done that before. My third year I went to SAIT in Calgary, and then my final year I decided, where am I going to do my final year of schooling? Which one did I like most? So I ended up in Red Deer for my fourth year and I really enjoyed it, probably because it was a smaller town. The instruction was more of a one on one. We basically had one instructor for all of the courses. If we were doing one course he could answer questions from other courses if we had them, and it was wonderful. So that was a good experience.

Q: Was it an apprenticeship program?

LR: It was an apprenticeship.

Q: Combing classroom training with practical on the job training.

LR: Yes.

Q: People are concerned about the environment these days. What is the company doing about it, and is the union doing anything about environmental issues?

LR: That's a big topic. That's actually one that I'm a little bit, how can you say, opinionated on. I see in the news, I hear all these stars complaining about the oil sands and destroying the land and all this. What they don't realize is that when all this mining takes place we're actually taking off the top layer, the overburden, that has all the seeds and all the plants and the roots and everything, we're taking that, removing it and putting it into one humongous pile. It stays there; then we do our mining. When our mining is all complete we fill it back up with all of the sand and whatever came from our final processes. It's all filled back up again. We take that overburden, we put bring it back and put it on the top. We reclaim that land, and all the seeds, the berries, the trees, the grass, everything comes back and it grows and comes back again. So when people are saying that we're destroying it, we have reclaimed so much. I don't know how many acres of land that we've reclaimed, but I know for a fact that we've planted over 3 million trees, and that's at Suncor alone.

Q: And you can personally attest to having seen it?

LR: Yes, I've seen it. I've had it in the back of my haul truck. I've had trees sticking up out of the back of my haul truck, and we bring it to the area where all that overburden is. It sits there and then it all comes back and it's reclaimed. So when people are saying that we're destroying it, we are temporarily digging and getting the oil that's down there, so much oil, and putting it all back and then it's good. We see deer coming back; animals are all coming back. We have trees planted upside down so that the owls will come and the, what are they called, owls and hawks. They like being there, they put their nests there on the trees that are upside down that have the roots sticking up out of the ground. They sit up there and they're watching for all the mice that are running around, to find their lunch and stuff. Yes, it's amazing.

Q: So you feel that they're doing an adequate job of taking care of the environment.

LR: They certainly are, yes. Any time there's, say, SO₂ emissions, we have very strict control on how much we're allowed to emit. I know that we are a lot lower than what we are allowed, and continuously we are continuously improving that and it's dropping down all the time. If anyone compared the actual emissions that come out of Fort McMurray, out of the oil sands, and compare it to the rest of the world, they will see how miniscule the actual environmental damage is that we cause. I would love for someone to have a huge map put on a wall somewhere to actually show the emissions damage. We have so many places in the world, like China for example, it's insane. L.A., there's fog continuously over the entire city all the time, and they're complaining about here, the small amount that we emit.

Q: So the big pipeline that was going to go through to the States, that was going to haul synthetic crude?

LR: Yes it was.

Q: Part of the argument was that at some point we have to do something about the dependence on oil. But that's another argument, right?

LR: I still don't understand why the United States doesn't say, "Yes, we want your oil." It doesn't make any sense to me at all when it comes to economics. We can support them so much instead of them bringing it from all the other places that they get it from.

Q: Your union took a stand on that that you don't approve of.

LR: Well yes, but such is life. Everyone has their opinion and it doesn't always have to be the same.

Q: Are the various areas of the plant sort of equivalent in terms of pay and benefits? When you went from heavy haulers to steam, were you able to maintain seniority and pay level?

LR: Years ago, actually so I started in the mine and I was there for four years. After four years I was making pretty good money. I had so many raises and I was pretty high up. Then I left there and I went to the steam bay, and I did get dropped down a number of steps. I stayed there for a couple of years and brought my wage back up again, and then when I took my instrumentation ticket my wage dropped yet again. It dropped a good bit actually, but I prepared myself financially. I knew it was going to be a four year haul and I prepared myself financially. I made sure my credit cards were paid off, I made sure that I didn't have any outstanding bills and stuff, and I was prepared for it. But I did take quite a drop when I did my instrumentation. Now I'm making B1 rate, which is I believe the second or third highest rate, which is very nice of course. But it did take me a long time to get back there.

Q: So seniority doesn't continue across divisions?

LR: Well when you change jobs yes, when you change jobs. But if I had just gone from where I am in extraction now to another area and still doing instrumentation, my wage would stay the same, which is what happened when I left the upgrader and moved to extraction; my wage stayed the same when I moved.

Q: What are the provisions at Suncor around maternity leave?

LR: I do know that, I believe, I'm not sure. I haven't been pregnant for a long time and I've not been pregnant at Suncor. But I do believe that depending on your situation if you're during your pregnancy, if you're in the mine, they don't want you operating the haul trucks due to the physical requirements. They don't want you out in the plants due to any kind of chemicals or any dust or anything that might be floating in the air, any gases or fumes. So the majority of times when people announce that they're pregnant they get removed from the field and they get put into a cleaner environment, so offices or they assist with I don't know, supervisory roles perhaps sometimes. They'll do paperwork or they'll work inside the safety department or I don't know, office services perhaps, the

Xerox copy room, different places like that. So they get pulled. I'm not too sure, I believe as soon as the girls announce that they're pregnant they were removed from those environments.

Q: So would their pay go down when that happens?

LR: That's a good question. That is one I'd like the answer for actually, because if they are taken off of their haul truck and they are put into an office environment, that office environment is usually say Monday to Friday, so they're not going to be on their 12 hour shifts. I know that it's not as many hours as what they would get if they were on their haul truck. I know that when they are on their haul truck they get extra money because they are doing the shift work and their going to nights and whatnot, so they lose that money. Automatically when you're on that 6-on 6-off shift you get 4 hours overtime every paycheque to compensate for the hours or something like that. I'm not quite sure how that works, but you do get 4 hours overtime every time. So I'm thinking that maybe those things do get dropped down and it does get affected, so that is definitely something that I would like to know. Another thing too is that when a woman is taken off of her truck, if she begins starting to feel sick despite the fact that she's not off actually having her baby, is she off on medical leave or is she off on maternity leave? Then when does maternity leave kick in? So these are things that I would like to know as well, so if you have answers let me know.

Q: You've been through the shift now from CEP. Has that made any difference in either your workplace or your union life?

LR: Oh in just changing the names of our union? No, I don't believe anything has actually changed when it comes to the actual dynamics of our union. no, I don't feel so.

[END]