

Alanna Marklund

Q: What is your union and your position in it?

AM: The union organization I'm with at a local level is United Association Local 488 in Edmonton, Alberta, Plumbers and Pipefitters Union. I'm also part of UA Canada, which is our international. That's who I currently work for now as a national manager for youth, diversity and indigenous relations.

Q: Where were you born and where did you grow up?

AM: I was born in a little mountain town – Hinton, Alberta. But I grew up in Grande Cache, which is about 140 km north of that, and a whole lot of nothing in between. That's why I was born in Hinton – there was not a hospital there to deliver babies at the time. But I grew up there, a small town of about 4,000 people, a little coalmining place, a very industrial area. That's what I grew up around.

Q: How did your parents make a living there?

AM: My dad actually worked at the coal mine in Grande Cache. He is an electrician by trade and initially got his trade out of New Brunswick. When the coal mine opened up in Grande Cache, that's when he moved to Alberta to start a life. That's where he met my mother, who's lived in Grande Cache since she was about 13 years old. It's that small-town home feel, hardworking family. I remember my dad coming home in the evening in his dirty coveralls and work boots at the front door. It was a norm for me and wasn't something that was ever looked down – it was promoted as an amazing career. My mom stayed home with us, he built a life for us. We had a house, we went on family vacations, and it created an all-round great childhood I thought. There's tough times in the mining industry and construction industry, but you make it work.

Q: What kind of education did you receive?

AM: I got my high school diploma. I took some trades courses while I was in high school in the tenth grade. The trades program that Grande Cache Community High School had was called the Elite Program, and it really was a fantastic apprenticeship program. If you completed it through grade 10, 11 and 12, you were actually given six months toward your first year apprenticeship with the Alberta government, which was a great incentive to go into the skilled trades. So when I say Grande Cache was a very industrialized community and had a good emphasis on it, they really did in the school system, supported at the same time. But taking that path, I was limited and I wasn't able to take the academic courses that I wanted, such as Biology, Physics, and Chemistry. In Grade 10 I just wasn't sure what path I wanted to go, so I took the one year of the Elite Program and decided to take my Grade 11 and 12 the academic route and do the higher courses and graduate with an academic diploma instead, just because I was so unsure. But after graduating high school and doing various jobs from waitressing, I worked at a real estate appraisal office, I've done secretary work, and after a few years of that I realized the trades was really where I should be. That's when I really started to pursue either a welding apprenticeship or – that's the one I always kind of had my heart set on, but at that point in time I was kind of open to anyone that would let me try. So that's where I started with that, and I kind of kicked myself a little bit wishing I would've finished off in the other program. But on the other side, by finishing my academic route through high school, I think it really helped me excel through trade school and it made it that much easier to finish and understand my trade, because I had that background that I wouldn't have got otherwise.

Q: What jobs did you do before starting the trades?

AM: The career I did before I started the trades, right out of high school, I actually worked at a gym through high school for a while. After high school I was kind of, hmm, where am I gonna go? Grande Cache didn't have a whole lot going on, so I actually ended up meeting my now husband, who lived in Hinton where I was born, so I ended up moving there after high school, just doing waitressing. I took a job at a real estate appraiser's office, and I actually really enjoyed that work; that was fun for me. But the economy got very slow in that as well, so I moved on. My husband actually had lost his job as a machining apprentice, and it forced us to move out here. We actually now live in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. That's where he got a job, and it was

there that I worked as a museum receptionist for some time, I did some waitressing, and realized I'm in a prime area industrialized province with fab shops down the street, there's refineries 20 minutes away from my house. There's gotta be something I could do that would help me excel in a different career in the trades. So that's why I started that. It's not that I didn't per se really like the jobs I had before, it's just I wasn't getting paid as much as I could be and just didn't feel like I was going anywhere. I'd always wanted to work with my hands. I'd seen my dad in the trade. My grandfather worked on the railways, he worked in the coal mines. My younger sister also is an automotive technician who started her apprenticeship before I did. I get to see the success that they had in their lives and I thought, I can do that too, I don't know what's stopping me. I may as well give it a shot, and if I don't like it well then I don't have to stay. No one's forcing me to stay.

Q: Do you remember what the working terms and conditions were like?

AM: I can honestly say the fabrication shop that I started in was a union shop, and to my recollection cannot remember anything that I felt unsafe, that I felt scared, that I wasn't protected in any way. It was a great shop and they really did look out for everyone. They never gave you trouble if you declined work due to unsafe working conditions, or mentioned you needed a different pair of gloves. They always provided proper safety equipment, all of our tools were always provided. I can honestly say I never did feel worried at work or scared that I was doing something that I was going to hurt myself.

Q: Can you describe a typical workday?

AM: A typical workday for me is what I actually loved about my first welding apprenticeship job. I like to be at home and comfortable and I wasn't sure I'd enjoy any sort of camp job life, so my very first welding apprentice job was at a fabrication shop ten minutes down the street from my house. I would get up at 5:30 in the morning, we started at 7, get ready and do my normal day. I'd be home by 3:30 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, so it really wasn't any different from the receptionist job I had before. It was Monday to Friday, weekends off, stat holidays off. It really was just a different job but my life essentially didn't have to change that much in that position,

which is what I really quite enjoyed about it. I like being home in the evening, I like being able to cook supper at my own house and sleep in my own bed. A typical workday for me was, I mean it depended on the shop. I always had an open mind while I was there. As a welding apprentice, most of my task was to be a tacker for the pipefitter, so I'd work very closely with the pipefitter working on a table that I used to call Lego for grownups. They'd hand you a print and the pieces, you prepare all the pieces and stick them together, follow them on the print and tack them all together and ship them off to the welder who then actually welded them out and put them together. So my first three years of the apprenticeship was mainly doing that. Once I got my welder's ticket, my journeyman ticket, I was actually able to become the welder in the shop and weld those pieces together. But it was really great that I got to see both sides of what a pipefitter does and what a welder does. It really helped me excel in those positions, because I understood what was happening. So that was fun. The very beginning of my apprenticeship, I was in a smaller shop at the back a little bit offsite. It was the support shop basically, so we got to build cabinets and roller trays. If there was anything in the shop that needed to be fixed, such as cleaning out positioners and gears and all that kind of stuff, that was kind of our duty to do so. So I got a lot of experience, not just in the pipefitting world but in the maintenance world too.

Q: What changes have you seen in your work throughout your career?

AM: Some of the big changes in the industry aren't necessarily, because I started in 2012, and I'd say there's definitely been changes since then. A lot of it's digital now or technological changes, the different kinds of machines you can use and all the different processes and things. But in the few years that I was in the shop it wasn't any major changes, but now moving forward you see a ton of different things happening. It's a complete upside down world from what welding was 20 years ago.

Q: Were you ever injured at work?

AM: I one time pinched my finger a little bit and my gel nail fell off. That was probably one of the worst things that happened, and it really wasn't bad at all. I guess it just goes to testify, the

safety that we did look at in the shop, I didn't have to encounter anything super dangerous or ever hurt myself. That wasn't even a reported incident, because nothing really happened. It was very small, like I had a Band-Aid from my back pocket. It was nothing major.

Q: How did you first come into contact with the union?

AM: Previous to starting my welding apprenticeship, I had been applying at multiple places – basically any sort of trade apprenticeship starter job anywhere. I was putting out résumés everywhere to try and get a job, and I did this for probably close to two years, with absolutely no call backs. Like I said, my résumé has secretary, receptionist, real estate appraisals. Nowhere in there does it say anything about being proficient in the trades. So that took me a long time. It took me knowing a really great friend of mine, not from the industry, but her brother actually worked at the fabrication shop, and finally he had given me kind of a little foot in the door and had put in a good word for me as a starter permit to try and get in there. Even then it took a while, when you have even a front end man saying, look, we need starters, maybe give her a shot. Even then it took a few months before the position actually became mine. I feel like that's one of the really hard parts about this industry, is just getting your foot in the door. Each province is very different. Here in Alberta for a welding apprenticeship it's a compulsory trade so you have to be hired by an employer who indentures you as an apprentice. Before you can actually join your hall or even start as an apprentice, you need to find that employer who's going to hire you. There aren't any really significant pre-apprenticeship courses for welding available in Alberta, so it's employers hiring people on the hopes that they'll do well. They don't get a lot of previous experience unless they do some sort of registered apprenticeship program through high school. So it's not easy to get in, whereas I know there are other provinces that have one year welding programs that you can take in secondary education out of high school, and it at least gives you something to put on your résumé showing that you do have some experience and that you can potentially can make it as a welder. For me, I didn't have that experience and there really was not a lot of places to gain any of that to try and even land that job. So that's why it's hard, but it really is, unfortunately, a lot who you know, and something I'd really strive to change in our industry.

Q: Did you phone places and cold-call places, and they just told you to go be a hairdresser or something?

AM: No, I had heard someone say that though. Another woman that I knew went in and talked to someone and gave their résumé, and he had told her, women are not meant to be in the trade, maybe you should go become a hairdresser or something. I think it was me that told you, but it wasn't me. Although I did hear one of the reasons I didn't get hired was because my nails were painted one day. I'm like, well I'm sorry, but I work as a secretary right now. Really, what's underneath my gloves doesn't matter, as long as the work's getting done.

Q: Were you involved in any union actions?

AM: Not necessarily in my fabrication shop at the time. Our local union has over 11,000 members so I'm sure there are things that take place. But for me personally, I've never had to file anything.

Q: Do you remember the politics of how meetings were run or how leaders were elected?

AM: Unfortunately, voter apathy runs rampant, not only with provincial and municipal and federal governments, but it runs that way in local unions as well and it can show sometimes. I'm not speaking per se against my union or anything like that, but you do notice, and people need to take more action if they really want to make some positive change. Making sure their voices are heard is important for sure.

Q: Do you remember any of the leaders or activists or role models?

AM: Maybe I'll skip that question for now, if that's okay. Are you talking mentors as in mentors on the jobsite?

Q: More pertaining to your union.

AM: Let's move on to the next one, and I'll think about that a bit more.

Q: What were your activities outside the workplace?

AM: There's lots. That's why I liked my job, because I had my weekends off and I had my evenings free. Me and my husband would really like to go snowboarding in the winter – we grew up in the mountains and that's a big thing for us. We also are quite fond of going scuba diving in tropical places, so it's nice to have that flexibility with our jobs so we can take a vacation here and there. Actually having the funds to be able to do so is also a really nice bonus. You don't have to worry so much when you know you have a job when you come home. You can enjoy your life that way. That's pre-children – it's a little harder now to do that. But I'm a crafty person I guess you could say. The homes that we've lived in, we've done tons of renovations to. Both of us are very hands-on type of people, so we've always made each house our own, and camping and quadding and all that kind of stuff.

Q: Were there any barriers or challenges you faced as a woman in the trades?

AM: I would say there were and are, but I think it's whether you really let them affect you or not. I think the initial barrier was just trying to get that job, trying to secure that job. Being lucky enough in my position, my hall was quite accepting of me on the jobsite. The worksite I was at, they were very accommodating. I don't find I ever really dealt with anything that was very serious when it came to any sort of harassment or discrimination. If it was, I guess I was able to kind of handle it myself. I think it's the attitude. I can't speak for every woman – everyone's affected differently and they have different things happening. But for myself, I was able to shut it down, in a certain way I guess you're able to shut it down. Depending on who you're talking to. It's such a gray area when you're dealing with things like that. If one person says, hey baby, it might be funny. But the next person that says it, if you don't have that relationship with them, it's not funny and it becomes creepy and it's tough. So I think it's just shutting it down right as it starts. But not everyone is able to do that or has the opportunity to do so. I think that's what makes a difference when it comes to dealing with that portion of it. But barriers that I face myself, just trying to prove yourself is harder. As a young man coming into the trades, you're

expected that you already know a whole bunch of things. A young man comes onto the jobsite and they're like, oh he must already know how to do this. As a woman, I have to prove that I know how to read a measuring tape, I have to prove I know how to swing a hammer. When I show up at a jobsite as a third year apprentice, it should be assumed already that I know how to do those things, simple things. It's just proving yourself over and over and over. Lucky enough for me, I was in the same fab shop for three years so I got to work with a lot of the same people for a long time. They knew what I was capable of and I didn't have to show them over and over again. But our industry isn't like that – a lot of the times you're going to all different jobsites, once every couple weeks or couple months, and you've got a whole new crew all the time. You've got to consistently prove that you know what you're doing, even though you have a journeyman ticket in your pocket that says you can; you're still not always believed that you know how to do so. I think that's one of the biggest barriers for women. Constantly proving that over and over is what makes it hard to get into a leadership role as well, because you have to constantly climb the ladder every single time you move somewhere else. Even in a leadership role you have to prove that you're the one who's supposed to be there, and aren't just there just because you're a woman, or many other reasons, why is she there. So I think that's one of the biggest barriers we face as women coming into the trade and staying there.

Q: Did you have female mentors or were you able to mentor anybody?

AM: There was a few women that were in the shop, and there were some absolutely fantastic mentors in there. There were some other ones – it's like anyone else on the jobsite – there's some people you can learn really great from and there's some people that you take their advice and smile and nod and pretend you're listening. You've seen their work before and you're, okay I'll hear what you have to say. You've gotta take advice in your own context too and use your own judgment. That makes a big difference – listening to what everyone has to say, because there might be a piece of advice that might really help you, but take it in context. I did have some good mentors, there were a few women in the jobsite I was at. But like I said, I didn't get to work directly with any of them. They didn't pair the women with the women and the men with the men, we were all mixed in there as if we were one crew working together.

Q: How did you make the switch from working in the welding shop to teaching at the college?

AM: I guess I can start with the whole story. As a welding apprenticeship, so I did my three years welding apprenticeship and as a second or third year I was able to get my provisional C welding ticket, which is like a B pressure ticket. It allows me to weld pipe but only at the shop I'm at before I can get my B pressure ticket. In order to get your B pressure welding ticket you have to have an Alberta journeyman ticket. Basically in the regular apprenticeship program you need to have Alberta journeyman ticket, then you can write your B pressure test, then you can actually weld on pipe. But as a second year, our shop was actually having trouble finding B pressure welders. What they can then do is they can offer a provisional C ticket to apprentice welders so that they can weld pipe without actually having to get their journeyman ticket. So that's what I had closer to the end of my apprenticeship. I was able to weld on pipe before ever getting my B pressure ticket. There's conditions with the C ticket, like you can only work at the shop that you're at. You can't re-get it again, you can only get it once and then you have to go for your B pressure ticket. But either way, I took the C ticket and I managed to get it, so I was able to weld pipe before getting my journeyman ticket. That gave me the experience I needed when I was asked to participate in the UA international apprenticeship competition. I first competed in the western competition, which consisted of all the UA locals from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They held the western regional competition in Vancouver. There were a few of us competing and I ended up actually winning that one, to my surprise, so I was excited. I went in with the intention of just going to have fun and doing my best and not worrying about it, because I knew I was competing against welders of the same calibre. So I thought, I'll just have fun and I'll just go and enjoy. But winning the western actually brought me to our national competition, so there was an Ontario group and an Atlantic group, and a competitor from Quebec as well. So I'm at the national level in Toronto competing against, actually there was two women and one male competing in the national competition. Again, to my complete surprise, I actually won the national competition as well. That was a very tight race, that one; there were some really great people I was competing against. The wonderful thing about these competitions is you get to make a relationship with all the people that you're with. You spend basically a week with all the competitors from all across the country and you think, oh I'll probably never see these people again. But really you definitely cross paths with

these people, so it was a great experience all around. I'm not a competitive person by nature, even in the slightest. I'm honest to goodness one of these, let's just have fun, that's all I care about. I play slo-pitch too and win, lose, it doesn't matter to me; I just like to get outside and enjoy it. So it was in the same boat – I just want to come here and have fun and do my best for me. But if I don't win, that's fine; if I do, that's wonderful. What happened is I won the national competition in Toronto and made it to the international level, which takes place every year in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As I get there I was told that I was an anomaly I guess, and that I had been the first woman in its 50 year history to have ever made it to the international competition. That was a complete shock to me, seeing as how this competition has been on for so long and I'm the first woman let alone first Canadian woman to ever make it down there. There's six competitors in each trade down there, Canada being part of District 6 with our United Association. So being a Canadian woman made me extremely proud. I didn't win that one, I did not win the competition for that one. They can't give me that. C'mon, I'm the first woman, that's overkill; of course I'm not gonna win. No, it was great though. It was international level so it was all the top star competitors from all across the United States that I was competing against. I thought, you know what, I can't believe I even made it here. I'm beyond overwhelmed and happy to be here; I'm just going to do my best and enjoy it. I actually did end up winning the George Bliss and Allyn Parmenter standard for excellence award from the United Association, which actually I won out of all the competitors. That to me was a complete honour in itself. It was awarded to the apprentice that showed leadership skills, camaraderie, basically everything that United Association's standard for excellence stands for. To me, I know I won it, but it was kind of a sign for me to show that other women in the industry are capable of this too, and using it kind of as a sign to expand on that and say, look, we have one woman here, there's a lot more that can do the same. For me that's what it meant to me, it meant proving that women do have a spot in the industry and we can make it. We shouldn't have to prove ourselves time and time and time again. So after winning that award, I'm kind of left shaking and shocked and whatnot. I went back to my fabrication shop and worked there for a couple more months. During the competition I actually spent quite a bit of time with the training directors and some of the instructors that worked at the Alberta Pipe Trades College. I'd kind of put the bug in their ear saying, if you're ever hiring an instructor, I know I'm new and whatnot, but keep me in mind. I said, this is the path I want to go on. I see my end goal in my career as to one day becoming an instructor. I loved being in school, it was one of my favourite things. I thought, this is where I want to take it, this is where I want to go. I want to be able to teach students, I want to be able to mentor them, I want to be able to show them what it takes to be in this industry and how they can do it well. So after

kind of saying, keep me in mind, keep me in mind, a few months later there was a welding position that had opened up. They phoned me and said, did you see that there's a position open? I said, ya but just keep me in mind; I'll throw a résumé in, but don't worry about it. I said, I know it's too soon, but I'll put my name in there just so that you know I'm interested and don't forget about me. They ended up calling me for the interview, they interviewed four or five other people as well, and phoned me for the job. Again, this whole life is a shocking life to me. I think I hit a streak of good luck or something, I don't know. But it worked out well and I took the job as a welding instructor. It was fantastic. It definitely had its challenges, but it was the career I was definitely aiming for. It was tough in some ways to go into that role right away as a new journeyman. I did receive my journeyman ticket prior to becoming an instructor. But I guess that's where I ran into the, well I wonder why she got that job, from a lot of people. That's where standing up for myself I guess had to come into account and say, the reason I got that job is because I actually applied for it. I sat down in an interview, like everybody else, and did my best. That's it. I did nothing else to put myself there but work hard every day and prove myself that I could do it. That was one of the tougher things, because you get a lot of backlash when you're a new journeyman and there's people that have been working in the industry for years and years that think they're entitled to that position. I'm sure they would be great at it, but I tried my hardest as well just the same as anyone else would've. I think that's one of the harder parts you have to deal with as a woman going into a leadership role, and I think that's why a lot of women are afraid of it. A lot of women are scared to try and advance their career, because that's what they deal with. They have to deal with the rumours, they have to deal with what people are saying behind their backs, and the disbelief that they're not going to be able to do it. My reasoning behind it was yes I'm new but I worked hard to get here. I tried to get here, this is what I want, this is what I'm striving for. Where was I going with that? It is, it's tough, it's tough to prove that to people. Maybe I am a new journeyman but guess what, I just completed the apprenticeship program. All those books that I just studied for the past three years are fresh in my brain. I know it, I know the stuff inside and out. Someone who's been in the field for 20 plus years, ya they make a great instructor and ya they're a great mentor, but when's the last time you picked up a textbook? They have to relearn, and like I said earlier, with all the digital and technical advancements that's happening in the welding industry, those books have changed over tenfold. It's all new information and it's all fresh, so I think that's another push that I had in saying, this is why they hired someone who's new and a new journeyman, because we understand what's happening currently. I can speak to the younger generation, I am the younger generation. But that's what you have to do, you have to think of ways of not necessarily persuading someone to see your side, but prove that there is a reason that you were chosen, and having the confidence and ability to stand up for yourself that way.

Q: At what stage in your life did you get into the trades?

AM: I was about 23 years old when I started my apprenticeship. It was in August of 2012 when I became a indentured apprentice.

Q: How did you first become involved in promoting women in the trades, specifically with your involvement in Build Together?

AM: I had been somewhat active within my local as an apprentice. My school, technical training, United Association Local 488, has Alberta Pipe Trades College right onsite at their hall. I was able to build a good relationship with our instructors, training directors, and some of the reps at the local union. So when the Build Together committee, the women of the building trades, became a provincial chapter here in Alberta, the executive director at the time, Warren Frailey, went to all the local unions and had asked them to pick a woman from their local to become a representative for their said local union. That was when Larry Matychuk at the time, who was our local union business manager, had asked me to sit on the board. I had absolutely no question whatsoever that that is something I would be absolutely more than happy to do. It has been an amazing journey to see this group of women that we've been working together for the past three plus years, and the places we're able to go and take this committee. So there's no question that it was something that I was really willing to do and it's something our industry needs, to be honest. We need a representation and I hope that one day we won't need it. We won't need additional groups to prove that women need a spot in the industry, we won't have to try and develop harassment policies and whatnot. In all honesty the way I feel and I think most tradeswomen feel, is we just want to be part of it. We don't need to try and prove this all the time, we don't need big hurrahs to make it happen. But right now we do, right now we need these committees, we need different conferences, we need programs. We need policies in place to set it up for the future tradeswomen coming in later.

Q: What's the role of Build Together in the province? What's been the thing you've been most involved with so far in Build Together?

AM: Where do I start? What I truly believe Build Together is about is an awareness. It is bringing to the attention that women are a crucial part of our industry if we actually want to move forward. Yes we want to be part of the workforce, and yes we want to just be included. But we are women, and there are different needs for women. Just as a prime example, we need our own washrooms – simple little things like that. We're not trying to change an entire industry to accommodate. We're not looking for hair salons onsite, it's not like that. We're looking just simply for equity and equal opportunity. We want gloves that fit our hands, we want coveralls that aren't going to drag on the floor of the port-a-potty. It's simple little things like that. For me, that's what Build Together is. Build Together is changing the stereotype to suit the industry saying, we can fit in, it's just these little things that need to change in order for everyone to work together easily and fairly. It's bringing about respect in the workplace, awareness to a higher level. As the Build Together committee we're able to talk to business managers, we get to talk to clients, contractors, owners, and just bring that awareness that there are still issues on the jobsite. It's an easy fix, it just needs to be dedicated to taking the time. I think that's what Build Together to me is doing. There are so many avenues that we can take it, and it's just with what ability we're able to do so. It's exciting times moving forward. When you put a great group of women together, good things happen.

Q: Is there something that Build Together has done that left an impact with you?

AM: Something that Build Together did that I'm extremely proud of was one of the presentations that we did at the Building Trades of Alberta conference a couple of years ago, bringing up an incident that happened on the jobsite. Should I bother going into the details of it? What we did at this conference is we put a quote or a little so-called made-up story onto a PowerPoint with a group of all the business managers, the local unions, executive boards, clients, contractors, owners were all in this room. We put up a little blurb on the PowerPoint and asked them to read it out. It was a story about a woman who was basically harassed on the jobsite. We had them do some group work at each of their own tables and ask, what would you do in this situation? It was clearly sexual harassment happening in this story. So the different tables got up and said, oh we would've reported that guy, he would've been kicked off the jobsite, he should've been charged, and all these things that would've fixed the problem. What

had happened is we ended up telling the entire crowd that it wasn't a made-up story as we had originally said, it was a true story that had actually happened to one of the women that were actually sitting in the conference right there watching the whole thing happen. We called her onto stage and she said that it was a true story and she told the outcome, that nothing actually happened. He was not charged, he was not laid off, he was not moved from site – absolutely nothing happened. The entire crowd, their jaws hit the floor. They could not believe that this kind of stuff was happening in this day and age. For me, that was a shining moment to prove to industry that there are things that are still happening on the jobsites that should not be happening. They should not be happening on jobsites, they wouldn't happen in public, they shouldn't happen anywhere. So it's just bringing that to say, look, we're not here just to show face, we're here to make a difference.

Q: How did the role of UA national manager of youth and diversity come about for you?

AM: My role as a national manager for youth, diversity and indigenous relations is actually a brand new role within UA Canada. It was created because our industry is really seeing a need to ensure that youth, diversity and Indigenous peoples are represented within our trades. The skilled shortage is huge, and it's coming with the baby boomers retiring. We need to focus on ensuring there's new people wanting to come in and do these trades. Basically we build Canada, we build North America. Tradespeople are incredibly important to our society as a whole, and the unions are starting to see that now. My role with UA Canada is a first. I believe my past career path has led me to this role – winning the award at the international competition, becoming an instructor, and whatever other reasons brought it about. But that's how I got this position now, and I'm extremely proud to say that it's actually the first of any of the Canadian building trades unions to have a position of this type. I have no counterpart in any other union within Canada. By setting this path and showing that we are taking initiative, I'm hoping it'll get the ball rolling with a lot of the other Canadian building trades unions so that they too can partake in this. I've been working in this role for about a year now and I've done a lot of things in one year that the industry hasn't even thought of trying to do yet. That's what's incredible about it, is it's got to start somewhere, and I want to see this take off within the entire industry so we can really set ourselves above.

Q: What skills have you collected over your previous roles with UA that helped shape your success in this role?

AM: That's a really good question. My previous positions to help shape me for the current role that I'm in, the word that's ringing in my head right now is confidence. I think that started slowly at the beginning of my apprenticeship. You need confidence to be able to prove yourself on the job, confidence to know I can complete that well and it's not going to fail x-ray or whatnot; confidence when it came to teaching, that I can stand up in front of this classroom in front of basically all men and prove to them that I can teach them something. It's the confidence to say, I know what I'm doing and I know how to do it. I guess that comes with the speaking skills, the public speaking all the time, and just knowing that, again, confidence that I know what I'm talking about. It was a slow start; I didn't always have that. It was those little pushes throughout my entire apprenticeship with mentors saying, Alanna you know what you're doing, just do it. You've done this before, you've got it, and if you don't get it the first time, try it again. It's simple advice but it's honestly life-changing. Just trying and don't give up, essentially, I think is what's brought me to that role. My grandma always used to tell me, you never know something until you try it. I know she was talking about me not eating the vegetables on my dinner plate, but in all honesty she's always said that to me – how do you know you don't like something if you don't try it? So any time there was another opportunity at the door or for advancement or to move up or take this course or that, I always said yes because I always had in the back of my mind, I'm not going to know I don't like that unless I give it a shot. So when I got offered to be a welder I thought, well I'm not going to know, and if I don't like it I don't have to do it, but at least I tried. Same with instructing – I'll give it a shot; I'm not going to know if I like it. I ended up absolutely loving it. I would've stayed there forever, but another opportunity came about, and now I get to work for head office. It's just not saying no and having the confidence in yourself knowing that as long as you're always doing the right thing and always doing what you believe is the right path for yourself and your team and your family, then you can stand by any of your actions.

Q: Earlier you mentioned people questioning, why is she here, how did she get that job? Do you find those types of comments in your current environment?

AM: I don't doubt that they're there, I don't doubt it; I'm sure things like that have definitely been said. But I'm not the kind of person anymore – because I think of my journey that that would've really bothered me before. What people used to say would eat at me and it would really bother me if someone thought negatively. But throughout my entire career path, getting over those hurdles over and over it's kind of like, you know what, let them think what they want, because I know I've done the right thing. I know what I did to get here. I know I can look back and prove to whoever wants to ask me that I've done the right thing and that I've taken the right way to do it without, how did she get here? I think because I know that I've done it honestly, I've done it for the good of me, my family, my friends, my coworkers, I can stand by my actions. That's why I think I can let those kind of things roll off my shoulder and I can't let it get to me because it gets in your head and can make you fail if you let that get to you. I think just being able to let it go, knowing that I've done the right thing, I'm content.

Q: You recently attended the Women Building Nations conference in Seattle. What was your role at that event?

AM: At the Women Building Nations conference that I attended in Seattle just this year, a week or two ago, it was my first time in attendance at this conference. It was definitely something to see. I've never seen so many tradeswomen in one room at one time. I think there was about 2,300 tradeswomen that attended the conference over the weekend. I attended as my national manager role through UA Canada, and I facilitated a forum that took place as what are the barriers that women face in the workforce? What would success look like if those barriers were gone? How are we going to get there? What are the recommendations that are needed to move this forward? Currently we're working on a report taking all of those findings and putting it together so we can show, look we had this many tradeswomen in a room, this is what they had to say. It all correlates to everything that you talk about. Every time we talk to another tradeswomen, it's all the same type of thing: maternity, paternity, childcare. It comes with hours, it comes with financial, it comes with proving yourself to the industry over and over,

breaking stereotypes, respect, discrimination. Over and over you hear the same things. We know that things aren't being finished fast enough to make this workforce more inclusive to women. I was also able at the conference to stand up in front of all 2,300 women and deliver a bit of a speech similar to what I've spoken about here, just promoting women in the workforce, telling your story, getting the word out.

Q: What were your maternity leave arrangements with your union?

AM: Maternity leave, when it comes to our industry, has not been touched. Because tradeswomen only represent upwards of two to five percent of the workforce, it's not a high priority for a lot of the people making decisions in our industry. Personal side for me for maternity, right now I have a little two-year-old boy, I just love him to pieces. I was pregnant with my son as a welding instructor. I was three months into my new job when I found out I was pregnant, which was exciting; that's what me and my husband were hoping for. The timing worked out later than we had initially planned, but it happened at the right time, at three months into the career. Working with welding fumes, cutting fumes, gases, chemicals, solvents and all that stuff is extremely dangerous in the first three months of your pregnancy, especially the first three months, but the danger is throughout basically. Most people give it that three month rule, is you don't announce you're pregnant until you know everything's said and safe and you're good to go. But because of the industry I was in, my boss knew I was pregnant basically before the rest of my family, which is tough. When you're trying to share your exciting news and you have to tell your boss first off, hey guess what, I can't be in the shop today. We were welding aluminum the day after I found out I was pregnant, so I had to go in there and tell basically everybody that I worked with that I couldn't weld that week because it was dealing with aluminum and toxic fumes. That was tough but the people I was working with were extremely supportive. I feel like I lucked out, honestly I did, because I was at the school. Had I been working in a shop or at a refinery out on site, on the pipeline, it would not have been as easy to just say, I'm sorry, I can't be in the shop this afternoon. It would not have went well, I can imagine. I know I wouldn't have been the only woman that's had to deal with that. A lot of women tend to hide their pregnancies. I've been looking into this for a very long time and there are a lot of birth defects, there's a lot of issues that can happen when you're exposed to things

like this while you're pregnant. There's just no awareness in our industry. I don't think it's a huge fault of the coworkers and the people that we're working with, it's just a lack of education. It's a lack of awareness in the entire piece. Even for me working at the Alberta Pipe Trades College, I was the very first woman who'd ever been pregnant there. So when I said, well I'll be taking a maternity leave eventually, it was like they hadn't even seen the documents for it before. They basically said to me, you tell me what you need to happen, because we haven't dealt with this yet. I'm actually currently expecting again, and we're very excited because my little guy is going to have a brother or sister. But I'm in the same industry, in the same boat where it's just a lot of unknown. I honestly don't think it's to the fault of the industry, but it's just a lack of education that no one even knows how the maternity leave works and what the rights are of a pregnant woman onsite. A lot of times if a woman is pregnant and she can't work, she can either take short term medical leave, which sometimes works but you don't get paid nearly as much, or what happens is the employer finds out that she's pregnant and they worry about liability and lay her off, and she's off for a year before she can even give birth to her child. Then she doesn't get a maternity leave, because she's used up all of her employment insurance on her pregnancy as opposed to enjoying that time with her child. It's definitely something that really needs to be brought up a lot more, a lot more awareness about it. It costs a lot of money for industry to train an apprentice; it's a lot of time. We have some really fantastic women out there, and if we don't support them through their pregnancy we're going to lose them. If they don't see that they have support moving forward when they're trying to raise a family – sorry, I'm going to get a little emotional – I didn't think I would. Think of support, people doing drugs, and your health and welfare plan, and you can't support a woman who's pregnant expanding her family. There's something wrong with that picture. That's where we need to go as an entire industry, is take care of the women we have. I need a Kleenex.

Q: In your new role as a national manager, I assume that you travel quite a bit. How do you and your family manage childcare?

AM: Childcare in my current role is definitely a juggling act, that's for sure. My husband works shiftwork, so there's times when he's home during the week, which turns out great when I have to travel. But other times it's not quite so simple, so I have him part time in daycare and I have a

lot of friends and family that I need to rely on. They have to take him for overnight trips sometimes. I have my younger sister, she comes and stays at my house when I'm away on trips sometimes. So it definitely is a juggling act. I can't just say yes to go to a meeting right away – I have to, let me check and make sure that I can get there. I've had to do a few Skype meetings over the Internet with our team, and if my little guy is having a rough day well he gets to join in and sit on my lap and participate. They were extremely accommodating that way, I can't complain at all. But I can see, even in my role for the amount of traveling I have to do, how difficult it can be for a woman working in the industry that has a camp job or is working a shutdown where she's working six days a week 12 hours a day. How do you raise a child like that? If it's a 12-hour workday, you basically can count yourself gone for 14. If you can find a daycare that's open for 14 or 15 hours a day, I would be shocked. Industry sometimes is not quite set up for childcare in that regard. Being able to provide an onsite daycare or modified work hours or job-sharing positions, that's something that we should look at as an industry to accommodate for that. Like I said, it's not to the lack of a father's fault, it's not. It's just society the way it is, it just ends up being the mother's job. I can't complain. My husband is extremely great with my son. Not a lot of women are lucky in that regard either. A lot of this stuff comes down to if the child's sick the mom takes time off work, if the child's sick the mom takes the baby to daycare or to the doctor or whatnot. It's almost just by default that's what happens. Our industry almost needs to, instead of fighting that and laying women off because they miss a day or two here because their child's sick, they need to stand up for that and create policies in place that allow that to happen, so that people can have a family/work life balance. That's one of the hardest things for mothers in our industry. There's a lot of single moms in our industry too, and that makes it even more difficult for them to find fulltime employment, especially something close to home.

Q: Are you aware of cases where the father has experienced these issues?

AM: Oh definitely. Actually one of the first journeymen I worked with, his wife worked fulltime and her job was actually harder to take time off work, so he would be the one to take time off work when the kids were sick or days off school and whatnot. He got grief for it too, so it's not just a women's issue for sure; it's definitely both.

Q: What was it like re-entering the workforce after your pregnancy leave?

AM: It was a whole new ballgame, a whole new ballgame to enter the workforce after being a mom. I thought I was tired before having children; that definitely changed. You have a whole new piece to worry about while you're at work. You've got a little piece of you that is somewhere else, and you've got more on your mind. For me when I was at work in the shop or instructing it was like, oh well, what am I gonna make for dinner when I get home? Now it's like I can't wait to get home to pick up my guy from daycare and I hope he was fine today, I hope he had fun. It's always another constant source of worry I think. For women that are working long, hard hours, I think it makes it that much more difficult. I had a really great close friend who's got a little girl very close to my son's age, and she went through the same thing working a shutdown. She said she'd be gone before her daughter woke up, and her daughter would be in bed before she got home. That went on for probably three or four months during a shutdown, just to try and make ends meet. So it's a whole new ballgame, and I think it's crucial that our industry does look at that. It creates unhappy employees when they can't see their children and have a happy family life. When your employees are happy and when you treat them well, honestly yes they might work less hours, but you're going to get more production out of them. They're going to be safer, happier, healthier, and it's better off all around. But that's changing an entire construction industry, not just unionized; it's changing everything to make that happen. It's doable, it's just going to show them that there's a conscious effort and there's going to be payoff to doing so.

Q: Do you believe that working in a unionized environment minimizes the pushback from male coworkers?

AM: A hundred percent. I think that being in a unionized construction industry, being in a unionized shop, I dealt with a lot less harassment, discrimination, pushback from the male counterparts. I truly do. I believe there's a standard set and that harassment is not tolerated. There's always things that happen, I understand that. But I truly think that as a protected worker under the union I have a much better environment. And to boot, in the union we get equal pay

whether we're male or female. I don't have to fight for that. I have an organization behind me that is protecting that right.

Q: What advice would you give to a young woman coming into the trades now that would've helped you when you started?

AM: A lot of the advice that I received at first was from my younger sister who was in the trade before me. She's got a rough and tough type attitude and doesn't put up with stuff. I think she showed me that that's what's important in the industry, is to not let yourself be walked all over, don't be a pushover. Don't be a mean person either. That's not to say that you can't talk to anyone and you have to be mean to anyone, but just stand your ground and have the confidence to know that you're doing the right thing and that you are capable, knowing that you're capable. That's what she taught me and I honestly think that's what I would tell someone else, that just believe and know that you're capable of doing it, and don't let anyone push you around.

Q: Do you believe that, with all the push from the government, we will finally see that 2 to 5 percent increase?

AM: I hope that we will see an increase in our industry because of the federal government and provincial government funding providing so much more money to get women into the workforce. I hope that we do get to see that advancement of more women. But until we see retention pieces put into place, I don't know how far we can go. We can bring women in left right and centre, I can go pull a bunch of them off the street for you right now and sign them up to be in the trade. But we need to make sure we can keep them. That's one of the biggest pieces for me. I think it's fantastic to bring them in, as long as we're bringing in the right people for the right job. When you do that, that's when you have to make sure you keep the right ones for the right jobs. That's why we need those retention pieces in place – daycare, maternity, discrimination policies, you name it. There's a lot of stuff, little changes we need to make in order to keep our women where they want to work.

Q: Could you expand on what you mentioned earlier about initiating some things that hadn't been seen before?

AM: One of the biggest things that we did in my new role for national manager of youth, diversity and Indigenous relations is we actually did an Indigenous students' program in conjunction with Skills Canada competition. We were able to bus out 20 Indigenous high school students from rural Alberta, bring them to the skills competition, let them do all the try trades, give them a bunch of swag, kind of give them the real showdown of what happens at Skills Canada and essentially show them all their options for expanding their career into the trades. It was fantastic. I saw this group of students that were quite shy at first and didn't want to try anything to about an hour later we were basically shooing them out of the building because they were having so much fun. So that was one of the big pieces that we're doing. We've expanded and created a youth leadership committee throughout the local unions. It's something that's brand new for us. Oh man, I have to think back of all the stuff. We are going to be hosting the young women's committee through Skills Canada, so that's going to be fun. We've run a number of different forums. We've participated in Women Build Nations from a national standpoint. We've created the UA Canada reward program that's actually taking place in New Brunswick right now. The only three welding apprentices in New Brunswick right now are currently under our program that we're running right now. It's things like that that are starting to push the envelope a little bit and make a few changes and prove, like I said, that we need to make a place for the women in the industry to retain them here.

Q: Do you want to talk about your upcoming maternity leave?

AM: Upcoming maternity leave. I will again be taking maternity leave. I'm thankful that I live in a country where I'm able to do so and paid part of my wage to do so. I think it's a little bit of a piece to show our industry that even in a leadership role we're still allowed to get pregnant, we're still allowed to expand our family. With my maternity leave I will be training a replacement for me, because now in 2018 we're allowed to take 18 months of maternity leave, so it's a combined maternity and paternity for up to 18 months. For me I know that I'm not going to make my salary, I'm going to make what the federal government pays me. But I get to

be home with my family, and there's something to be said for that. In that role it's tough for me to step away from this role, being the only one in it, for a year and a half. But what's going to happen is I'm going to replace myself with someone and I'm going to train them, and they are going to get experience at a national manager level, something that they probably would not have been able to do before. Even though they know it's a temporary position, they're going to be able to take that experience, put it on their résumé, and it's going to further their career. That's how I feel about it. It's another foot in the door for someone else to gain some experience so they can further themselves.

Q: Do you think it's important to have women in these leadership roles in this industry?

AM: Women in leadership roles are one of the most crucial pieces to making sure that women's voices are heard on the jobsite. When a woman can sit at the table with organizers, with business managers, business agents, on executive boards, that's when we can bring those opinions to the table. Maternity probably wouldn't even cross the minds of a bunch of men sitting around a table. You'd have a few that would think about it, but they're not going to bring it up. Things like this, this is where women bring up these issues and can really make these changes. Not only do you have to have the woman sitting at the table being able to bring this stuff to attention, but she's got to be able to have the role enough to make an impact. That's why we need our women to run for these local union positions, become instructors, become business agents, get them to be business managers, get them into an influential position where we can actually consciously make these changes. When we're on the tools – don't get me wrong, we need the women on the tools, and I absolutely loved being there. I would be happy to go back. I absolutely loved my job on the tools, being able to put on my work boots, go to work, see a project go from the ground up. To me I absolutely loved being there. But now in my current role I get to allow more women to do that, and watch them climb the ladder and just make more space for more women to come in.

Q: Do you think that as women progress in leadership, that there is less stigma about being a mom and having a home life? Or do you think it would be the same?

AM: Can you rephrase the question?

Q: Do you think that because of your role as national manager that when you have to take a day off to tend to a sick child or to just be around when your husband couldn't, do you think that you get the same or less or more flak for those duties?

AM: I think being a mom in a leadership position compared to being a mom on the tools, I think there could be a difference but I think it would mostly depend on who you're working for. In my leadership position, if I have a sick child and have to stay home it works out okay because essentially I work from home and I'm able to do my job. So I think it's a little easier for me to say, I'm sorry I didn't get that email out today, I had this happen. When you're on the tools, you miss an entire day, and that's where a lot of the flak would come in from your employer, missing eight hours as opposed to being, well I can work digitally, I can work through communications resources. When you're on the tools, you need to physically be on the jobsite. I think that's where women on the tools run into a lot of the problems with childcare and whatnot, because essentially they have to take off a full day of work and they're missing a full person's production on the job, which costs money. We all know that money is everything when it comes to industry. So I think that's why it's harder for women on the tools to be able to take the time that they need for their family.

Q: At the level you're at now, you have to travel more and attend more meetings and seminars. Have you ever seen daycare offered at any of these conferences? Have you ever seen opportunities where that life balance can be balanced for women?

AM: I see it moving in that direction a little bit more, essentially from a higher up standpoint. I think a lot of the head leadership really does understand that women are in the workforce and that they need things changed for them and whatnot. But I think it's the trickling down through the entire industry that there's pieces missing there. I know if head office supported a woman taking a day off because her child was sick, that doesn't necessarily mean that the foreman on the jobsite with his boots on the ground understands the same token. I think it's a whole communication piece through the entire industry. For myself, no I personally haven't seen

daycares at conferences yet to make up for that. But that's not to say that they don't want to do it, it's just that the issue has never really been put forward to make it happen. With our Build Together committee and other women in leadership roles, we can start to influence those pieces and see those changes come along.

[END]