

ANGELA_GRANDBOIS

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Location: Edmonton

Interviewer Donna Coombs-Montrose

Q: Tell me about yourself.

AG: I was born and raised here in Edmonton, Alberta. I'm currently living in Andrew, Alberta; I've lived there for four years now. I just had a baby; she's going to be two on Halloween.

Q: Tell me about your status.

AG: I'm a First Nations from Cold Lake, Alberta.

Q: Which nation are you from?

AG: Our language would be Dene.

Q: Tell me about living in Andrew.

AG: It's a small village with the world's largest mallard in it.

Q: Is this an indigenous community?

AG: No, mostly Ukrainian. That's where a lot of Ukrainians settled when they came over to Canada.

Q: So you're one of the few indigenous families living in Andrew?

AG: Very few, yes.

Q: Tell me about your early education.

AG: I went to high school at Boyle Street Community Co-op – I think that's what they call it. Then I went to Amiskwacyi Academy for grade 12. I took a RAP program. I started with hairstyling and started my apprenticeship doing that for about eight years, but it slowly led into pipefitting after. I took a pre-apprenticeship program with Trade Winds to Success; that used to be over on 95th Street and 118th Avenue. Through that program they let us observe the different

trades. We had a choice between boilermaker, pipefitter, welder, carpentry, and I think that was it at the time. They've added a few things since then. They took us on tours to visit different local buildings or whatever they're called. At first I chose ironworker because I thought, oh that's exciting, it's dangerous. But then I thought about it and at the last minute when we had our choice, somebody mentioned that steam fitting was one of the most challenging and that people don't normally finish it. So I changed my mind right then, and I chose steam fitting. I went through that pre-apprenticeship, and I started with Local 488 doing shutdowns at power plants.

Q: So your inspiration came from the danger of the job?

AG: Yes, cuz I like a challenge.

Q: You then went onto an apprenticeship program in steam fitting. Did you work for a company at the time?

AG: No, after the program you go directly to the union that you chose to work for. There were four different groups that split off into their designated trade that they chose, and you continued learning tricks of the trade, like using wrenches and hammers and tape measures and the basic stuff of construction. Then they take you over to the union dispatch, and you just pull a slip and you're off to work.

Q: Who did you work with?

AG: It was a company called Alstem and it was at Sundance power plant out by Wabamun.

Q: When you arrived there, were you the only indigenous person on the job?

AG: There were three of us from the program that went to this job, all three our first time there. There was a male and another female. She became a welder, and I can't remember what the other guy did.

Q: How long were you at Sundance?

AG: That was just a shutdown, so it was maybe six weeks. It was a good starting point.

Q: What happened after that?

AG: Just different contracts all over Alberta, mostly Fort Mac. I was still younger, so I chose to do nightshifts all the time and get paid more. I thought that was helpful. I did new construction, I did shutdowns, projects in Edmonton and Fort Mac. Lots of work at Suncor and Syncrude plants. Actually I never even went back to the plants, they call it the lakes – Sundance and whatever the other one is called.

Q: How did your co-workers receive you?

AG: Very judgmental, big time. I didn't really pay attention to it too much. I was just there trying to be the best worker that I could be at the time. I wasn't really worried about being looked down on or anything.

Q: Did people look down on you?

AG: Oh yeah, because I'm an average female trying to do men's work. I would just block it out of my head and never really paid attention to it. I just kept going, kept trying to work hard and go home at the end of the day safe. That's really what anybody else's goal is too. That's a major thing, safety.

Q: Did it take an emotional toll on you?

AG: Some days I didn't want to go back because I hated being judged. I don't know how I got over it, but I just kept going back and kept working and just trying to prove myself. It was really hard, especially when I went up to camp. That was really hard, Suncor and Syncrude. I was really isolated there, just being lonely there, not around my family. As aboriginal, we're used to being with family all the time, and we're family oriented. Just not being around them as much as I was used to, so I felt really lonely. But I was there to work and just be the best me, and not having to worry about being called a stupid Indian or something stupid like that. I just tried to block out all the hurtful words. I would go back to my camp room and cry sometimes. I think what's upsetting me is I'm just trying to work, that's it. I'm not trying to be here and be just like a token native girl, trying to show off to the boyfriend. That's what a lot of people said, I was just there to get a husband and then go back home. That was never my intention. I made it a point not to date anybody in the trades or even hang out with people from work, because

people say nasty things. I went to a party one time. There was a bunch of pipefitters there, girls and guys. It was just stupid because I went back to work on Monday and there was rumours going around that I was a lesbian. Just ridiculous stories that I've heard made up of me. I don't know why people can't just mind their own business and just speak for themselves and worry about going home safe and that's it. That's all I go to work for, just to make money and go home safe.

Q: Do you like your job?

AG: Yes I like my job a lot. I like working with tools, I like working with people. It's fun when you have a good crew and everybody gets along, there's no judgment, and you don't have to be a bitch, because there's nobody there judging you. That's what I had to do, was just start acting like a bitch for people to leave me alone. I guess that's the way I coped with it for a long time. Finally I got my ticket. I knew I was a hard worker so I knew I didn't have to prove anything anymore. I could just go to work and make my money. People say, oh are you an apprentice? Right away when I go onto a new jobsite they say, oh are you a labourer? I'll say, no I'm a pipefitter. Oh, okay. What year are you? I'd say, well year 10, or whatever year it was. Then they'd just back off and finally show a little bit of respect. That was another big thing I didn't like. Say there's a 50-year-old male second year apprentice, he would get more respect than me because I'm a female and aboriginal. He would get more respect than me, and people like a foreman or operator, they'd go and talk to him before they'd come to me, when I'm the journeyman of that particular job. It used to piss me off an awful lot, just not getting respect. Every job I had to start over and prove myself again.

Q: Because you were aboriginal and a woman?

AG: Definitely because I was a woman. I know obviously I'm clearly native, but I didn't try to think about that. At work I don't see race, I just see a worker – either you're good or you're not. That's what it's about. You're either going to work safe or you're not going to work safe. If you're not going to work safe, I don't want to work with you.

Q: Have you had any additional safety training through the union?

AG: Every time we go to a job, there's a site orientation and you do different training courses like Confined Space. There's always something to upgrade your levels, there's always something new to learn, which I enjoy. I became a foreman eventually, right after I got my ticket. That was a good experience and that was really challenging too. Just being a girl foreman in a construction area, it's just like, oh well, who'd she blow to get that position? That's what they say behind your back. I know, because as an apprentice I'd see a journeyman woman foreman, and they'd say that about her right in front of me. So I know that's what they're saying. I was happy to be there, but at the same time I like working on the tools too. You stay busy all the time, and it's a lot more challenging.

Q: When you're on the tools, you're in charge of a crew, or are you working by yourself?

AG: That means no foreman, just working with the other guys.

Q: Do you find them respectful, or does it depend on where you work?

AG: It depends on the person. Some guys just roll with it, and some guys, especially younger guys, they're just arrogant, but they wouldn't listen to me if I gave them a task to do. I didn't know how to deal with it.

Q: So what did you do?

AG: I would just get them on a different crew; I would just take them off the crew. They'd be willing to work for a guy, but not a girl.

Q: How did the crews work?

AG: I got this particular job, I was just supposed to be a fill-in foreman just to help spread out the work amongst the guys. We didn't have designated crews, because it was a shutdown, so every day the crews always changed. There were two other foreman guys, and they realized quickly who was working and not working for me, so they would take that guy on their crew that day. They were helpful with that, so I was glad for that.

Q: Did you meet any other indigenous women in the trades?

AG: For sure. There was a couple boilermaker ladies I know, and I still contact them. There's another pipefitter lady, she was still an apprentice; she was an apprentice for a while. I don't know why she didn't get her ticket, but I think when she saw me get my ticket before her, after being in it for so long, she finally went and got her ticket. I think so, I hope so. When I started, there was just usually only me, the only girl on the white site sometimes.

Q: What was that like?

AG: I never tried to let being a girl on the site be an advantage or disadvantage. I just went to work, tried to work as best I could and as hard as I could. For me it was important just to be a good, safe worker – that's the main thing. If people had a problem with me, that was their issue. It did make me upset, but at the same time I had to just keep pushing past that and just work towards my own goals. I got through it.

Q: Where did you do your apprenticeship?

AG: This was project work at Suncor. I was the only girl until the shutdown started, and then there was another pipefitter lady that came on. Actually there was two I think; I can't remember. But they were in the trade a long time, they were the originals. I didn't hear too many stories from them because they were on different crews, so I didn't get to know them personally.

Q: Did the company provide any special provisions for women?

AG: No. In camp the women got, say ten trailers were lined up, nine of the trailers would be the men's wings and then the women would get one wing. It would be mostly the staff workers, but now there's so many tradeswomen out there that we get two wings.

Q: Were there any provisions for your indigenous culture?

AG: No.

Q: Do you get any recognition in your community for the work you do as a tradesperson?

AG: Not really. I wouldn't mind going out there and providing answers to people's questions. I want to go back to Trade Winds to Success and show them what I've accomplished starting from there, and show them what else I'm doing. I'm not just stopping at steam fitter pipefitter, I'm moving on to power engineering now. I've got to get out more. I've just been working all the time so I've never really been in that kind of opportunity.

Q: How has your work impacted your family?

AG: I met my husband through work. He's a welder. I even told myself in the beginning that I would not date another tradesman, but I realized we know all the same people, we know all the same things. So it kind of makes sense just to be with another tradesperson.

Q: Is he indigenous as well?

AG: No, he's an Englishman.

Q: Were you encouraged to move to Andrew because of that?

AG: Yeah, because of him.

Q: So that's where you're raising your family?

AG: Yeah.

Q: But there's no work in Andrew?

AG: No, not for that.

Q: So you come back to Edmonton for work?

AG: Yeah, we come back to the hall and get our dispatch slips from there. My last job, I just did a shutdown at Nutrien, used to be called Agrium. I did that for three months, and it was a half hour drive back and forth to work.

Q: Tell me about your family.

AG: I don't get to see them as often as I would like to. Ever since I started working it's just been work all the time. I come back for so-and-so's birthday, because there's so many people in my

family there's basically a birthday every weekend. So I've missed a lot of birthdays but I'm alright with that; I got over that a long time ago.

Q: Are any of your family in the trades?

AG: My cousin became a pipefitter after I did. He started out as a labourer and then he moved into pipefitting. He had to take a pay cut as an apprentice doing that, but now he's got his ticket. I think he's working toward something else right now.

Q: What gave you the inspiration to become a pipefitter?

AG: I worked at a pipe stacking yard and it sort of gave me a clue into the pipefitting world.

Q: Tell me how you qualified to being a steam fitter in addition to being a pipefitter. Did you apprentice for steam fitting?

AG: Oh no, it used to just be called pipefitting. But they put different codes into the program, so they just call it steam fitting and pipefitting together.

Q: So it's an addition scope of expertise.

AG: It is, yeah.

Q: How long have you been in the industry?

AG: Twelve years now.

Q: How did you move from stage to stage?

AG: I started my apprenticeship in 2007. I keep getting this throat tickle. I started my apprenticeship in 2007 and I got indentured at Sundance while I was working there.

Q: What does that mean?

AG: It just means you get your blue book and you're registered as an apprentice. Then I worked on multiple jobs, mostly in Fort Mac, Syncrude, and Suncor. You just gather your hours and then at the end of each year you go back to school. For me it was every June I'd go back.

Q: You'd go back for how long?

AG: For two months each time for four years.

Q: And that would take you to the next step?

AG: You become first, second, third, and then I can't remember how it, but somehow I ended up having to do an extra year. They moved it from four years to three years and then back to four years, so it was kind of back and forth, and I had to do an extra year. Then I had to do another extra year with the union, because under the third year program they weren't properly skilled journeymen, so they wanted extra training done at the hall after you finished your apprenticeship. We did more courses there, and then once I got that course finished I became, I can't remember what it's called, journeyman for the union.

Q: The union certified you?

AG: Yeah. I can't think of the name right now. You get your apprenticeship finished but then you do your extra year, so you're basically doing four years. But they moved it back to four years again because they realized that the apprentices aren't as skilled as they should be, so they added back the fourth year in the regular with the Alberta Apprenticeship Board.

Q: Does the union then post you onto jobs?

AG: Yeah pretty much. When I finish my apprenticeship with say NAIT and I write my provincial exam, I get \$40 or whatever the price was. But once I do this extra year, then I get another increase in wage to \$45. Then you just go on to foreman and eventually GF, but I don't know if I want to do that.

Q: What is GF?

AG: General foreman, looks after all the other foremen, then the foremen look after the crews. General foreman looks after the foremen to make sure they're doing their paperwork or whatever, the foremen look after the crews, then you're on the tools. Tools, craft foreman they call it, general foreman, superintendent. Depends on the company, they have different levels above general foreman.

Q: You worked a variety of places throughout the years?

AG: Yeah, new construction, shutdowns, projects. That's pretty much it.

Q: Does the union have any special facilities for indigenous people?

AG: The union? No.

Q: Do they give you any special recognition?

AG: Oh no. Just a worker.

Q: Have you done any other training over the years?

AG: Yeah, right now I'm working towards my fourth class power engineering. I did my two ABSA exams and now I'm just doing my steam time at NAIT evenings and weekends. For a fourth class there's Part A and Part B. They can both be done online. You work through the online course and you've got to pass your NAIT course before you can challenge your ABSA exam.

Q: What is ABSA?

AG: ABSA is Alberta Boiler Safety Association.

Q: Is that an additional certification?

AG: I've got to do the Part A, I did that, and the Part B course, both for six months each. Then you study for your ABSA exams, and you pass those two. Then you have to do your steam time, like practical. Right now I'm currently doing my steam time at NAIT on evenings and weekends. I'll be done that December 8th, and then I'll have my power engineering certificate.

Q: Could you tell me about your family life? You've spent a lot of time training and working – how has that impacted your family or community? Do you have any children?

AG: I have a daughter. I was lucky, my one niece just finished high school so she was looking for a summer job. I happened to get this shutdown job, so she came out for a couple of months to help me look after baby.

Q: How do you manage otherwise, when your niece isn't available?

AG: I'm not sure yet, because that was my first job back since I had the baby. I started out with 40 hours a week and then moved up to one week of 84 hours. It was a good start back.

Q: Are you able to come home?

AG: Oh yes, home every night. It's a half hour drive.

Q: Your partner supports you?

AG: Yes, he was home actually. He just finished a shutdown himself, and then once I finished my shutdown he went on to a different shutdown somewhere else.

Q: You mainly work shutdowns?

AG: Pretty well. There's always maintenance calls, which is just fixing stuff here and there. But you're not busy all the time, and I like to be busy all the time. On shutdowns you're busy all day. On maintenance you might get one job a day, maybe two, and sit around the whole day. I can't do that.

Q: Have you met a lot of people from your community in the different workplaces?

AG: Not a lot, no. Definitely a lot of characters. I just recently met a boilermaker fellow who's aboriginal. My one pipefitter friend, she's aboriginal, a couple pipefitter friends. But I don't often run into other pipefitters. It's pretty slim.

Q: So there are few indigenous people working in the trades?

AG: Yes. You'll see maybe one per job, other than myself, at different sites.

Q: What's the difference between steam fitter and pipefitter?

AG: Steam fitters, in order to get energy you need steam. Steam goes through pipes and then out into different lines from the plant into generators and turbines that split it off into electricity. The pipefitters are the craft, and then there's welders. Basically the pipefitters line the pipe up nice and perfect, and then the welders come and weld the pipe together. Or else we do flange fittings, and that's just studded connections. There's all sorts of different connections, and they're always putting plants together and auxiliary parts from the boilers together. The

boilers themselves are what the boilermakers work on; they work on the actual vessel inside and outside. Then the pipefitters come and put the pipes onto the vessels, and then everywhere else.

Q: Have you seen changes over the years in the materials used?

AG: That depends which product is being used. PVC is mostly for plumbers, drains, low-pressure mines. Steel – carbon steel and stainless steel – is for high pressure. Copper would be for water, because it's low pressure. It depends on what's going through the pipes, because there's different thicknesses and densities of the pipes, and that's what determines what you use. For copper you solder it, for steel you weld it, stainless steel you weld it. PVC you just glue it. It all depends on what pressure you're using.

Q: Is this part of your training that you're required to know?

AG: The current training I'm doing? Yeah. It's a big part of steam fitting too, a lot of theory to it, but it's also part of the power engineering, which is why I'm trying to learn as much as I can. I'm still kind of young, so I'm trying to get in as much as I can.

Q: So you'd like to stay in the industry?

AG: Yes.

Q: Are you involved in any union activities?

AG: Sometimes they have Galaxyland nights and the World Waterpark, social events, and Christmas parties, and all the union members bring their kids. That's about it with them.

Q: You're not engaged in any workshops or stewardship with the union?

AG: No.

Q: Do you think that might be a good thing? It sounds like the union's consciousness needs to be raised a bit about indigenous workers.

AG: I'm not really worried about that. I don't know what my thoughts are on that.

Q: Have you ever asked the union if they could hire more indigenous workers?

AG: I think that's what the point of Trade Winds to Success is. It used to be in the union hall. When I started it was over on 95th and 118th, then they built the school at the union and then it was part of that. Now they're in a different building but still close to the union. I don't know how much support they're getting or not. But that was the aboriginal connection, I guess.

Q: What does Trade Winds do?

AG: I think it's government funded. It's a pre-apprenticeship program directed for aboriginal kids. They provide you with safety tickets like CSTS, WHMIS, harness training. I can't remember if we did our JLG training there or if that came after, like aerial work platform. You do two months of math and English and science and stuff like that related to your trade, then you break off into your designated craft that you chose. You get hands-on learning – learning how to use a measuring tape, how to cut pipe, how to put pipe together with bolts, and stuff like that. I don't know what the carpenters learned, obviously wood stuff, but that's about it. You break off and go get your dispatch slip and go to work.

Q: Do you know other indigenous students who moved on into the trades?

AG: Actually the one fellow I just mentioned, he came from Trade Winds to Success and he's a boilermaker now. I lost contact with the other students that I attended with.

Q: Is the program still running?

AG: It's still running but I'd have to go check it out and see what's going on. It's been a while since I've been back there.

Q: It would be good to go back and inspire them.

AG: I would like that, because I've learned so much and I enjoy learning. It changed my life.

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

AG: I don't think so. I think I said pretty much everything.

Q: How does the union job dispatch work?

AG: Every day at 4:30 they'll post the available job online or you can call to see what jobs are available. Then you go down to the hall. It depends on what date you signed the board, so whenever your last job was. Say my last job was June 2017, there'll be probably hundreds of guys after me because it was two years ago. When I went in, because I was out of work for so long, I got first choice on the job. Depending on when your sign-out date is, you get first choice of whatever jobs are up there. If it's gone it's gone, then you have to wait for whatever you're waiting for.

Q: You were out because of maternity leave?

AG: Yes.

Q: So when you came back you were at the top of the list?

AG: Yes, now I just finished a job so it'll be a while before I'll get close to job choice.

Q: Is that the only source of employment?

AG: For our members, yeah.

Q: How do you find childcare?

AG: I already made the choice with childcare that I'm not going to work out of town, because I don't want to be away from my baby for that long. If I do find a job, it's got to be local, either in Edmonton or area – like Agrium or Shell, Scotford. I was lucky my niece just finished school, so she could come help me. Next time I get a job, we'll see what happens. I really don't know yet. That won't be until January, so we'll see what happens then.

Q: Do you get a subsidy for childcare?

AG: No, there's no maternity help for members.

Q: How has being a women and indigenous impacted your working life?

AG: I'm definitely a very strong person. I'd love to see more aboriginal girls out there. I saw one girl, she was a welder. I like teaching other apprentices, I like showing them how to do stuff.

When they're learning their future skills from me, that makes me feel pretty happy. I wouldn't mind if there was a lot more of us out there.

Q: What can the industry learn from your experiences? What would you like to see in place?

AG: I don't know if there's anything in place. I guess they have ethics courses now, but it's really just like a matter of times changing. People just have to learn to start respecting one another; that's basically it. Have respect for others if you want to be respected. It's really personal opinions. Another thing is I just didn't want to be a rat, like she's using her aboriginal card, or something stupid like that. Then it's even worse because they're like, oh no, I'm not working with her – I'll say something wrong and then she'll rat me out and I'll be gone. That's another thing, it's hard to even step up and say there's something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Q: What do you think about employer responsibility?

AG: They do say there should be no discrimination – we have diverse people here, there's so many ethnicities out there. They tell you right in orientation at every job you go to. But some people are just ignorant and they won't change. So just wait until they retire, and the new people coming in are a lot more open-minded. It's just a matter of time.

Q: So it exists mainly in the older workers?

AG: Well it's definitely in the younger workers, because they learn from the older ones. I think it's actually worse in the younger guys. But when they don't have the guts, like somebody tripping in their ear to be hurtful to other people, then they will just back off and start being themselves. It's not only me, there's other races out there. There's the new Muslim guys out there, and they're feeling discriminated against. It's not just me, so I don't feel like I'm just singled out.

[END]