

## Mary Strong

Interviewer Jordan Thompson, Camera Don Bouzek

MS: I was born on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1957. I was born in Uranium City, Saskatchewan. I was born a twin; my twin died at birth. I was 4 lbs 7 oz, my twin was 5 lbs. The doctor came to my mother that night and said that they lost one but the other one is fighting. I was in an incubator for about a month. My father's name was Victor Secrets, and he was a fisherman. My mother's name was Mary, and she was a stay-at-home mom. I had an older brother, his name was Rusty, and an older sister, Jeanie. My father drowned when I was about four and a half. He was 30 years old. My mother had a hard time coping with the death. She struggled so much just raising her five children, she turned to alcohol for her support. I have another sister, Vivian, and a brother named David. When my mother was struggling, somehow the social services came in. They took the three oldest away and I was the youngest of those three. We were put in foster care. We were not put together, so I lost contact with my older brother and sister. I grew up in a small town in Saskatchewan and I experienced abuse at the hands of my foster parents and foster sister – mental abuse, physical and sexual. I was raised not to appreciate my culture. I was considered lower than low. I was treated, it's hard to say; I guess that's going to be taken off. Through the abuse, I was programmed to understand that I was nothing, I was a nobody. I didn't know anything about my culture. I wasn't exposed to anything that had to do with the native culture. My ancestry and everything was erased or gone. I was told that I was stupid, I was ugly, and I would never amount to anything. I was told that my mother didn't love me and that's why I wasn't with her. I was never going to be loved by anybody, I was just an unlovable person. For the fear of not being believed of the abuse I experienced, I kept quiet. I did try to talk to the priest, but it didn't happen, I just couldn't come out and tell him what was happening. They were a well-respected family in the community, and I just felt that I wouldn't be believed. So I kept quiet and I endured that abuse for 12 years from grade 1 to grade 12. I managed to go through school, graduated, then I moved to a small town in . . . Oh, I met my mother when I was 17. I had mixed feelings about the whole thing, because I was told that she neglected to take care of me and she didn't want me. I had to deal with my feelings of anger and resentment. But when I spoke to her she explained to me what happened and how she really didn't appreciate the fact that we were taken away, and she tried many years to get us back but to no avail. I am part of that '60s scoop now, so I have to apply for that, for when the native children were taken

away in the '60s. It took a few years, but there was some healing and forgiveness. When she passed away, we were very close; we had a very good relationship. She passed away in 2011. Also my older siblings, I did kind of get in touch with them while we were growing up, but we were still separated. I think I did go to school with my sister for a few years, but she lived in another community close to where our school was. My sister passed away in 1999 at the age of 43 with cancer, and I just recently lost my older brother in 2018 October, and he was 65, also of cancer. I graduated in '75. I started to work at the hospital in Wakaw, Saskatchewan. I moved to Wakaw, and while I was there working . . . I had very low self esteem. I was very shy, very withdrawn. But one evening a cop went by, a police car went by, and he stopped. Because I was new in the community, he asked where I was and what was I doing, where I was working. He just kind of wanted to know who I was. Then he offered to take me for coffee. But in the end, he ended up raping me. He took me out of town and I was raped. He told me that I was not to say anything, because nobody would believe me – he'd just deny it. So because of the abuse I went through as a child, because of being quiet, I also felt that I had to be quiet about this. Again I crawled into a little hole and I just refused to leave my place; I just went to work and went home. One day I thought, oh I'm just going to go for coffee; I'd better get out and do something. I went for coffee, and that's when I met my husband. We dated for six months and I was engaged, and then we married six months later. We got married in June of '76 and then my first son was born in '77. His name is Brian. We had moved to Saskatoon. I was planning on going to school and taking my nursing. But all of a sudden I'm pregnant, so things didn't happen the way I thought they would. So I'm a mother. We stayed in Saskatoon for a few years, then we moved to Spiritwood, Saskatchewan. He was in road construction, he drove what they called a Caterpillar; I don't know if it's still called a Caterpillar. He was gone a lot and also he would drink a lot, so I felt again isolated and alone. One evening a couple of his friends, after we'd been there for about three months or so, some of his friends came over and brought some beer. I said, well he wasn't home, and they said, oh that's okay, we'll just have a couple with you. They basically made themselves at home and after a while it's like they kept on coercing and pushing, and next thing I know I got raped by both of them at the same time, so it was like a gangbang. My baby was about a year and a half. That totally destroyed me at that point. I'd just had it, I just couldn't take any more. I couldn't tell him, when he came home I couldn't tell him. They said that they were going to tell him that I asked for it, like I was the one that got them. So he

went for a nap when he came home, and I took the truck and I decided to, like I wanted to commit suicide. I just couldn't go on like this. I just felt like I was the worst person, the worst mother, the worst on this planet right now. So I decided to take his truck, and I knew where there was a steep embankment, a steep hill. It was raining that day. It's like it happened yesterday, it's so clear. It was raining so hard and I was crying. My wipers were going but it wasn't doing any good, because I was just really distraught. I was coming around the bend going probably about 100 miles per hour, and I knew where the curb was and I was just about ready to go. But something stopped me. My foot would not press on the gas, and it kept going to the brakes. I'm like, no, I don't want this, and I tried to resist it but my foot had a mind of its own – it's like, no you're not doing this. So my foot managed to stop the truck, and I don't remember anything after that. All I know is that I was in front of a church. I was back in Spiritwood and I'm sitting in front of the Catholic church. I didn't know what to do, so I ended up going to the church pew, in the church because it wasn't locked. I went to the front and sat on the second pew and I was looking at Jesus on the cross. I was crying and I'm like, I don't know what to do, I need your help; do you see me, do you see me? Do you know what's happening here? I wasn't sure at that time if he was here. I went to the doctor's office and I went to the receptionist and I said, I need to see doctor so-and-so. They said, well do you have an appointment? I said, I just tried to commit suicide, so do I need an appointment? She brought me into the doctor's office right away, and the next thing you know I'm in the hospital for four days and they had me under heavy sedation. Needless to say, my husband found out why and what happened. It was really hard. I had a psychiatric nurse beside me when I woke up. I was very bitter and angry and didn't want to talk to him and tell him anything about what happened to me in my life. I felt embarrassed, I felt that I didn't want to reveal any of this stuff. He tried to talk to me about Jesus and about his love and his forgiveness, and I threw him out of my room; I told him to get out of my room. I said, I don't want to talk to you about anything; just leave me alone. So I went back home, but our relationship, something had happened there. Something was destroyed, because of the fact that he felt that I had betrayed him. He was again gone to work or gone to drinking with his buddies, so I was again isolated and alone. We moved, I think we moved to someplace in Saskatchewan, no we moved back to Saskatoon. He got involved with someone else, and the next thing I know he's leaving. I actually heard him on the phone with her and I'm like, well what's happening? He's like, oh I've been seeing her for the last two months and I'm

leaving, I'm out of here. So that was it. My son was four and then I had my other son, who was two. All of a sudden I'm a single mom. I was on assistance for a while at the beginning. Let's see, what else happened? I think it was just a matter of trying to find work, trying to do something. I did find work at a law firm, I did do some clerical work there. I also found some work with Saskatchewan Health or something, where I also did clerical work and computer. I was having a hard time again, being a single mom, having a four-year-old and a two-year-old. I was feeling very lonely, so I went to the bar a few times, but it was something that I really didn't want to do. There was nothing else to do and I thought, oh okay. Then I found what was called Christian Singles and I thought, maybe I'll attend this and check it out. The lady that ran the group was very nice and she was ready to help me as a single mom – we're having supper, come and join us. So I started attending the group and then they had a Bible study on a certain night, so she invited me to Bible study. I'm like, okay it's something to do, so I went to the Bible study. Over time, I started to attend church with her. It was a Free Methodist church that she was going to, so I went. As time progressed, I started to understand more about what Jesus was all about and what the Bible was all about, and what it meant to have a relationship to grow spiritually. One morning when I went to church with her, I decided to make a commitment, and I turned my life over. That was in 1982. I just started growing, I started searching for other churches. I went to a Baptist church, and that's where I was baptized full immersion. I don't know if you understand that part, but it's like a profession that you're saying to everybody that, yes I have committed myself to God and I want him to be the lord of my life. But I still struggled with loneliness, I still struggled with wanting to find somebody to love me for me. I was going to the bars again, so I was kind of bouncing from the church to the bar to the bar to the church. It was just a very hard time for me. I struggled with that for so long. But I also continued trying to look for something permanent. I was pretty much doing temporary positions with a temp agency, so that's where I would end up at the Saskatchewan Health Services and the law firm and so many different places that I worked. I then decided, through a friend, to pack up and leave Saskatchewan and move to Edmonton. She used to live in Edmonton so she said, I'm moving back to Edmonton, why don't you move to Edmonton? I'm sure you'll find jobs there, and you can start fresh. I'm like, that sounds like a good idea. So I packed up my 10-year-old and my eight-year-old and there I was driving to Edmonton. I ended up at the Lorana House and I was there for about three months. They provided me with contact places or places where I could apply looking for

housing. They were there for me and did support me quite well in finding myself and getting myself planted in Edmonton. I believe I started, I'm not sure where I worked before that, oh ya. I did work at a native organization at Canada Place; I worked there for two years. It was a program for small businesses, for native people to start small businesses in Northern Saskatchewan. I did a lot of clerical work there. I then decided to move, take my kids out of the city. I didn't care for my kids being raised in the city, so I moved to Westlock and then I started working there. I worked at the bottle depot and I worked for a place called WJS, which was a homecare type of thing. Then I found a position with the LoSeCa Foundation through St. Albert, and that's when I started working in Athabasca. I worked as a health support worker working with a couple of ladies in a home. It was mostly like towards mentally challenged. So I worked in that home for probably about a year, and then I had another position in St. Albert. No, then I worked with a gentleman in Athabasca. He was in a wheelchair and it involved breathing and feeding through a tube. It was more like a respite type of thing, so taking him to doctors appointments and taking him for shopping -- just a home support worker. Then I moved to, well I was outside of Westlock but then I moved into town. I worked with WJS. I'm kind of getting mixed here; I can't remember everything.

Q: You mentioned a car accident in Saskatchewan and an insurance settlement that helped you purchase a home.

MS: Yes. I had a vehicle accident in Saskatoon, I was rear ended. Out of that, things weren't settled yet so when I moved to Edmonton then I got a settlement from that accident. With that settlement, I decided to purchase a home. This was out on an acreage between Westlock and I can't remember the name of the town -- Rochester, it was between Westlock and Rochester. So we stayed there and then when my son was. . . Okay so before I moved to Rochester, I had met someone. I thought this was something really promising, I thought there was something there. Next thing I know, I'm pregnant. When he found out, I never saw him again. All of a sudden I'm a single mom again. So when I got the settlement, that's when I moved. My son was probably a year and a half, and I moved to that little acreage between Rochester and Westlock.

Q: How old were your older sons at this point?

MS: Fifteen, fourteen.

Q: And then you had a third boy?

MS: Yes. They were going to school in Westlock, so I decided to move to Westlock. I just wanted to get out from the acreage; it was kind of isolated. So I moved to Westlock, and that's when I started with the WJS working in Athabasca. When my son was 12, my youngest, he got into some trouble with the family. He sexually assaulted my grandchildren, so his niece and nephew. We don't know how long. It was a full, like he didn't, it was more touching, but it still devastated the family. He ended up getting charged and he was sent to a group home; I think it was called Bosco Homes or something, around Edmonton here. He was there for probably about six months and then they transferred him to Calgary. I can't remember the name of the place, but it was another group home. I was again having to deal with the pain and the hurt from the family, like my sons were really hurt by all this and so was I. There was a division that happened in the family because of that, so I was kind of in the middle between my son and between my two sons in Westlock. I was really having a hard time because there's a lot of hurt. Because I was traveling to Calgary a lot to go see him, I decided to move to Edmonton because I wanted to have someplace to go to when he was discharged. So I decided to move to Edmonton, and again I went through the whole thing. Well I did work in St. Albert, like I transitioned, I still stayed with the job in St. Albert with the LoSeCa Foundation. I believe I also went on to the single men's hostel. No I'm sorry, it was the single men's hostel before I moved to Westlock when I first came to Edmonton.

Q: It later became Herb Jamieson.

MS: Yes. I worked as an intake worker, I was at the front desk. I did security as well, making sure the guys were out in the morning. Just registering a lot of them coming in. While I was working there, that's when I met my son's father. When I moved to Westlock he was only about a year and a half, or to Rochester. So then when I came back he was 12, so that's when I came back. That's when I worked at the Salvation Army I believe, as a drop-in. We had breakfasts and we

had lunch for the people on the streets, so we would provide hot meals. I don't know what it would be called, just a drop-in centre. I worked there for a while, probably about three or four years. Then I found the job with CBI.

Q: I'd like to backtrack for a minute; it sounded like there was a period of about ten years in there. You moved from Rochester to Westlock, your older sons were teenagers. What was some of the work you did during that time? You were traveling from Westlock to Athabasca doing homecare?

MS: Ya, it was pretty much working with WJS, and that was like a group home type of thing. Then when I moved to Edmonton I was still traveling. I also had a vehicle accident when I was working in Athabasca. That was 2006 that I had that accident, and again it was somebody that rear ended me at a stoplight. I couldn't work for about a year or more. I was on the insurance, so I was going through physio and all the things that I needed to do.

Q: So you were injured in the accident.

MS: Ya. Then that's when I didn't go back to Athabasca, I ended up finding a job with LoSeCa Foundation through St. Albert.

Q: Are there any other details before we move on to the CBI story?

MS: I don't think so. I was just pretty much trying to survive as a single mom.

Q: What year did you take a job with CBI? How did you hear about it?

MS: I was looking for work. I've always enjoyed what I was doing as a caregiver. I've always had a heart for people that needed that kind of thing, that kind of service. I guess through looking for a job at Canada Place or the employment office or on the board or whatever, I just applied and applied different places. I found CBI, so I decided to apply there. I had the interview and found a job.

Q: What year was that?

MS: It was about eight years now, so 2011.

Q: What was the job like?

MS: Well I started working in the community going to do home visits. They would give you a schedule and you'd have probably about 18 visits a day. It was very hard on my vehicle. My first year that I worked there, I put on 30,000 km. They don't pay you mileage, they give you \$1.25 per visit. If you have 18 visits a day, you make roughly \$26 or something just for fuel, but you spend more than that. There might be a visit on the east end and then another visit on the west end, so you're kind of bouncing. Everything is on a timeframe, like 8 o'clock visits or you'd have to be there at 11 o'clock or noon or you have to be there at 2 or you have to be there at 5. Then sometimes they would have more than one person at the same time, so they'd have four visits at 5 o'clock and it's not near each other. All of a sudden you're there and then all of a sudden you're there, and then you have to go back there. It wasn't in the area where you could say, okay I'm just going to go here to there to there and stay in the same area. At that time it was all over the place. It would say half an hour, so by the time you drive there, you go do what you need to do, you're just barely making it in half an hour. Then you have to drive to the next place. I found it really hard but I kept on doing it. I was late many times. How can I be at that place at 5 o'clock and be at that place at 5 o'clock and be at that place at 5 o'clock? I started to start a little bit earlier and did whatever I could, then I started to map my visits. I'm like, okay so this person lives at this place and this person lives at that place, then this person lives over here. So what I'll do is I'll go see this person and this person and then go to that person. I started to get a little bit more organized in my visits. But it was really hard on the body and hard on the car, depending on traffic and depending on parking. There's so much involved in doing this type of work. Then winter driving or it's really raining hard and you have to park two blocks away because you can't find a parking spot. It was quite a thing to do, but I did it. I was just really worn out and I didn't feel that I was getting paid enough for half of the stuff that I was going through. You have to deal with some clients that are belligerent or rude or not happy about this or that, so they take



it out on you. It's a very stressful job, but yet you get to meet people and some of them are nice. I did still enjoy what I was doing, because I was getting to meet other people. I like working with the public and doing whatever services that need to be done, whether it's giving medication, putting on stockings, giving baths, making meals, or doing whatever it is that we need to do. I did that for a while but after about a year I said, they have lodges as well, so I'm going to apply for a lodge. So I applied for the lodge. I lived up in the Abbotsfield area, so I got two lodges in that area. I'm trying to think of the names of those lodges now. I can't think of them right now, but I can get back to you on that. I worked at those two lodges, so I'd start at 6 o'clock in the morning on one lodge and work until about 1, then I went to the other lodge at maybe 3 in the afternoon and worked until about 7. I did enjoy it because I didn't have to drive all over the place. I could just go to the lodge, do my work there, and then go home, and then go to the lodge after that and again go home. It wasn't too bad at all, and I enjoyed working with the people in the lodge. I did that for a while. I ended up back in the community. I'm not sure if that's where I injured myself; I think I pulled a muscle in my back and wasn't able to go back. When I was working with the LoSeCa Foundation, going back again, I was taking care of a lady that had seizures. She was having a shower one day and I heard a thump, so I went in there and she had a seizure I guess and she fell. She was in the bathtub and I was trying to help her because I didn't want her to injure herself any further. I reached for her legs to position her a little bit more this way, but she jerked and in the process it pulled a muscle right in my wrist here. I had to go again to the doctor and that's when they said that I have a ligament tear, a tendon. So they had to operate, so I was off work again for a while. That was before I ended up in Edmonton. I was on WCB again because it happened at the workplace. Then when I was working at the lodge I was also doing, on the weekends I would do some evening visits as well. At one of my visits I was assisting someone to transfer from his wheelchair to the chair, and in the process, the way the person moved or the way I moved, I pulled a muscle in my back. Again, I had to be off work for a while and be on WCB. It was just one thing after another; it seemed like I kept injuring myself. CBI at that point were like I should've been more careful or I should've known how to transfer and use my body mechanics.

Q: That's what the employer said?

MS: Ya, why didn't you do this or that? It was like I felt like it was my fault, I'm not a very good worker or whatever, because I felt that I didn't follow protocol on certain things or something. Right there was when I could feel something didn't feel right with my employer, something had kind of shifted in my work ethics and me as a person as a worker. Then I went back after about six months, and that's when I ended up having to be out back in the community. I worked with the community but another position came up for the lodge, so I managed to get myself back into the lodge. I worked at the Queen Alex on the south side. That was better, awesome, because I live on the south side and it only took me about ten minutes to get to work. I worked in the lodge starting at 6 in the morning and I worked until 2 Monday to Thursday. On the weekends then I would work again in the community. So I was working community, I was also doing a lodge. When I hurt myself, that was when I was working in the community. I went to do a home visit and it was a long weekend in May 2017, and there was a dip in the sidewalk and I didn't see it. I hit it and I fell head first onto the pavement, so I broke my left wrist and it went like this underneath me and folded underneath me. So broke it in two places. This happened on Sunday night. Monday morning on the May long weekend, they operated on my wrist. I was at the Royal Alex. So again I had to get in touch with CBI; I had to actually call on call on the Sunday night when it happened. I called them and they said, well you have to come in, you have 48 hours or something. Well I'm in the hospital. How can I go into the office and fill out a 48 hour claim? I said, well I will try to be there as soon as I can, but right now I'm in the hospital in emergency waiting for someone to come and see me. I'm in pain. So they operated on me. The following day right after the operation on Monday, Tuesday morning, they expected me in the office to fill out the forms. I managed to go but I was in so much pain and I was probably still under sedation and I was sick, but I still went in there and had to fill out these forms. When I got a hold of WCB the guy that was taking care of my claim called me and told me that CBI was saying that I was not working at the time of the injury. They said that it happened on public property, or it was like they felt that I couldn't do a claim because of the fact that it was not on public property or it was on public property, and that I wasn't working at the time. I said, that's false, I was working. I was leaving my second client, I had four clients to see at 8 o'clock. I was seeing my second client, I was on my way to go see my third client. They said, well we don't have anything on your schedule, they said that you weren't on the schedule. I'm like, what? If I hadn't printed off my schedule at that time it would not have shown, because they erased it off

of my schedule. I told him, I have my schedule in front of me, I have the names of the people that I was supposed to see. So I faxed it to him and I said, I was working at the time of my injury. So everything was okay, I was approved. But if I hadn't had that printed-off copy of my schedule, I don't know what would've happened. But they erased my schedule from the moment that I injured myself to the next month forward – I had nothing on my schedule. That just really upset me because I thought, how can they attempt to do that? How can they do that? It's like they didn't care. They wanted me to start in the office that Tuesday on modified light duties. I had a cast on, I was still in pain. I'm like, I can't do that. So I went to my doctor and said, this is what they want. But I said, I'm in so much pain, how can I go and do modified work at the office? So she put down that I'm not able to work at the present time until I see the surgeon from the operation, so I think it was about another month or so. But they didn't treat me very well at all. When I did go to the office and do some modified work, it was like they were very abrupt and very rude and very cold, like do this, who cares, work with the pain; so what if it hurts, you still have to do this. You've got to put in your hours, otherwise they will get a hold of WCB and say that I'm not doing my part. I was under a lot of stress, a lot of pressure, to the point where I was almost crying every day. WCB ended up helping me by referring me to a psychologist, so I started seeing this psychologist at the Millard. Then I was also attending the physio treatments there. So between the office and the Millard and physio, I was just constantly doing something, just on the go right from Monday to Friday. But I wasn't doing any home visits at that time. I didn't do any of the community work on the weekends that I usually did. But I wasn't healing. I was going to physio, I was going to the Millard – I'd done everything that I needed to do on that part. But I still wasn't healing. The pain was still there just as bad, I couldn't do a lot of things. I went to see the doctor for my one year follow up and he said, okay this was in May 2018 and at that point he said, you're going to have to get another operation. We're going to have to rebreak your wrist and we're going to have to shorten the bone. When I fell, one of my bones compressed, so it made it like one bone was longer than the other. So they had to take a bone out of my elbow and attach it to the bone in my wrist. Now I have a metal plate in here on my wrist and another metal plate going down here. I had the operation in October, so again I'm back on fulltime WCB. They didn't pressure me this time. Maybe they knew that there's nothing they could do about it or maybe they started to see that this is a serious injury, not just an ouch and it'll heal and move on. It was different this time. I also had a different supervisor. I don't

know what happened, but everything has turned around like it's improved. I am still stressed because I'm frustrated with myself because of what I can and cannot do. Even in the office, the filing and going through the flow sheets, I had to alphabetize the flow sheets so it was very hard to do with my wrist, because I still had to use it no matter what, to be able to slip in the sheets in the alphabet, if it was N or B or G or whatever. As the more sheets went in, the heavier the pile went. When I had to slip it into let's say S, I had to lift up all of the A, B, C, D... all the way up to S, and then slip the paper in. I found it very hard to do because of the lifting. So I would get very frustrated with myself. At first they did kind of like, well Tina, you've got to do this. They started giving me a sheet that I had to fill in, what did I do at 10 o'clock and what did I do at 11 o'clock and what did I do at 12 o'clock. I started to feel like I was under the gun kind of thing. I had to go to the bathroom, so what did you do and how long did it take you to do this, and whatever? I talked to my supervisor at that point and I said, why do I have to do this? It's making me see what I can't do, it's making me see how incompetent I feel about myself that I can't do my job. I said, that's all it's showing me, it's like that I'm not pulling my weight or I'm not being productive. So not very long after that, they no longer gave me the sheets to fill out. But after that she started to really hear me and she said, do what you can. If you need to take a break, take a break; if you want to go for a walk, go for a walk. Have your lunch, just take it slow. If you can't do something, wait until the next day or something. If it's too much, let us know. So they started to allow me to speak and to know where I'm at and what's happening. Then she also offered me some counseling through CBI if I needed it; they have a crisis counseling or something. But I was already seeing a counselor through WCB so I said, that's okay, I'll continue seeing this counselor that I'm seeing. But that has improved. I also got involved with AUPE, so that's another side. Between that and WCB and AUPE, I'm starting to become busy with other things, so that's another chapter of my life.

Q: I'm interested in hearing about your experience with the union.

MS: When I was working at the lodge, the Queen Alex Lodge, that was probably about four years ago. When I went to the staff lounge, I guess it was an AUPE representative. She just said that someone had contacted her and said that there's a possibility that we may be able to try to go for AUPE, and whether I felt the same about it and what my thoughts were. I said, ya I think

that would be a good idea; sure, I'm in. I guess she was speaking to many of the workers. It's very hard, because we are so spread out and we don't get to see a lot of our members. Because of the community work, we don't have a set building where we all get together. The only time we get to know some is between shifts, the morning shift and the evening shift at the lodge, so we may be able to get to see some members. I guess she spoke to most of the people that worked in the lodges. Somehow, I don't know how or why, but all of a sudden I'm in there. I'm starting to attend meetings and I'm starting to do an information session at the CBI office. We had a little barbeque in the lot at the CBI building and there's Tina, I'm in there. There was maybe about five of us who are more dedicated and working with AUPE. So all of a sudden I'm in there and part of the OH&S, not the OH&S, I was part of the bargaining committee, I think it was the area council or something. I was in there, but then we had our chair and we had our vice chair and our secretary and treasurer. I started going to the AGMs and all of a sudden I was integrated right in there and I was very much involved. We went to our bargaining and had our, we didn't go through arbitration but we did have like a mediation. I attended everything. I went to school, I went to the courses that were available – understanding a union, all the courses that are involved in AUPE – conflict resolution, there are so many. I also went to labour school, I went to convention. So I was very much involved. When we had our last AGM, guess what, I'm not chair. Chair, oh my gosh, that's a whole new thing. Now I'm setting up meetings and I'm going to convention again this year. I'm also going to labour school, so there's a lot involved there. We finally after four years have a contract. It was settled in April and we got our retroactive pay, but only from January of 2019. So that is now happening. Because we have a contract now, it's a matter of, I took the course the last two days before I came here for the union steward. I'm part of the OH&S committee as well. I'm also part of the OH&S committee at CBI, so I'm working with both. I'm also attending physio. I just started again yesterday with the Millard. I'm going to be on a six-week rehabilitation program. So between that and work and AUPE, I'm going to be quite busy. But ya, things have improved at work now. They are listening to me, they are hearing me, they are accommodating. But there's so much that a person has to really understand and know in regards to policy and in regards to how to do certain procedures, not only with AUPE but also with CBI. That's about it.

Q: Had you had any previous experience with unions?

MS: None.

Q: So far, what do you think about the union?

MS: I think it's a good organization. I think they are there to help us. I get to understand how much we can do as members to bring forth understanding of what AUPE is all about and how they can help the members and the workers.

Q: You mentioned that CBI's attitude has become more supportive. Do you think your union involvement had any influence on that attitude shift?

MS: I think so. I'm sure they know that I'm very much involved, because I'm always sending in time-off requests for union business. I know that they know I'm chair of our chapter. I think they're kind of like, okay we have to kind of watch our Ps and Qs, just so I won't do anything or go after them or something. I don't know what they're going to think when they find out I'm going to be a union steward. I'm going to be out there to fight.

Q: Based on your experiences with workplace injuries, what would you say to other workers?

MS: I think it would be really good to make sure that you're educated, that you take whatever courses you need to take in order to keep yourself safe, whether it be WHMIS or just knowing how to use your body mechanics to do transfers. Try to take your time, not to rush. One of the things is, because we have to travel so many places in so much time, we tend to want to rush. That's probably what happened when I injured myself, because I was rushing. We have to take the time we need and not worry about being in a hurry to get to the next client. I think too that it's also important that if something should happen, to keep a record and documentation, keep dates and times available so if something should happen then you have something to go back on and refer to. Let's say if it's something to do with maybe bullying on the job or whether it's a client that may be belligerent or aggressive at times, to make sure that we have that written

down so that if it's a pattern then we can address it with the employer and something can be done about it. If we don't have documentation, that right there would be a problem.

Q: Did you have any influence over the conditions of your work that could've prevented the injury when you were rushing and tripped on the sidewalk?

MS: I think it's just the pressure of getting your clients done and being there on time so they don't end up having to wait for you. I had clients saying, you're so late, or, how come you're just getting here now? I guess it's an inner part of you that just feels like, oh I've got to hurry up and get going to this client, because I don't want this client to be angry with me, or I don't want to lose my job because I can't fulfill my responsibilities. I think it's mostly inside of yourself that you just feel that pressure. You just feel that you need to do it, you just need to go. Maybe I shouldn't have gone so fast or been in such a rush. I don't know whether there's any way around that.

Q: Did you determine how many visits you made that day, or did the employer determine that?

MS: They determine that, yes.

Q: Do they have control over the pace at which you work?

MS: Yes. There's so many other different things that happen in a workplace. It's not just falls and stuff or being in a rush. Sometimes you might have to use a mechanical lift, and you're supposed to have two people to do that. There was a time when I went to the client and there was not another person. I think that was when I pulled a muscle, but I had to try to maneuver the mechanical lift by myself. I was not very happy about that. There's so many different little things, even safety concerns. There was another client that I had to go see, and it said that it had to be a two-person visit. The other person didn't show up. So I called into the office and said, well I'm here but nobody's here. They told me to just go ahead, and if there's a problem to call them back. But how do you know if you're going to walk into a situation? You're putting yourself on the line when you do that. Another time too I went to see another guy, and it was

another two-person. She came and we went and took care of the client, then before we left she said, oh do you have another visit after me? I said, no I'm done. She said, well I have another client to see, so I'm going to go right away, so you just go ahead and finish up the paperwork. So I did that and then I left. But I'm like, why did she leave if it had to be a two-person visit? I talked to my supervisor about that and I said, why did she leave? What's the reason why they needed a two-person visit? She said that visit involved with the area that we were working in, it was a very bad part of the city so it was more like a safety concern for us to make sure that we were safe in that neighbourhood. I said, well she shouldn't have left then. She said, no she shouldn't have left. She said, I will have a talk with her and let her know that if it says a two-person visit there's a reason why it has to be a two-person visit. It's like you have to be aware of the situation. They usually have it in the care plan where it says, this is a two-person visit. Or an example is there might be bedbugs in the building, so you have to follow protocol and wear your PPE. There's so many different areas that you have to be careful and you have to be aware of. They do tend to have that in place where they have, this is the reason why we have to have the workers make sure that this is happening or that they follow this or that.

Q: Did CBI provide training for the job?

MS: Yes, we had orientation. I did take the course too at the beginning; I took the whole HCA course, so I got my certificate. I didn't have a certificate at that time.

Q: Did they pay for that training?

MS: Ya.

Q: Did you get any safety training?

MS: We are taught the whole thing about the WHMIS, the chemicals and infectious diseases and how to protect yourself from anything that we may be exposed to.



Q: Have your experiences with your injuries and your union involvement changed you in any way?

MS: Yes, I started looking at things differently now, looking at it from a different angle and seeing that I do have rights. I can voice my opinion or stand up for myself or I can get a hold of my MSO and say, this is what's happening and what can I do about this? So ya, it's a whole new window to look through on how to perceive situations through CBI or through AUPE and how I can integrate what I'm learning and what I'm seeing into it all so it all works out in the end.

Q: What interests do you pursue in your spare time? Are you in a relationship?

MS: When I have time, okay when I was going through what I was going through in my past and my marriage and all the breakups, my first marriage ended because he was hurt but also he was drinking a lot. There was physical abuse involved there, so I went through that physical abuse. Then when I moved to Saskatoon and I found that Christian singles group and the church, I did make that commitment, I did surrender my life over to God. My spiritual life was starting to fall into place. I've also enjoyed karaoke; I just love singing. Just give me a microphone and some music, and I'm there. So that's when I was kind of shifting from the church to the bars to the church to the bars, because I loved the karaoke and I loved the bars, but I also was feeling this wasn't really where I wanted to go in regard to relationships. I've been kind of struggling with that for quite a while. When I moved to Edmonton I continued working, I continued with the karaoke. I built up a social group of friends here and there, so that's where I'm at right now. I still enjoy my karaoke. I go to the bars but not for the drinking part, but just for the singing part. I actually went last weekend to Westlock and sang karaoke. I also like Elvis a lot. They have festivals in Busby every year, so I've gone for ten straight years of going to the festival. It's a weekend thing. I take my son's camper and then I just stay there for the weekend. That's my passion I guess, is just singing. But no, I'm not in any relationship right now. I'm happy.

Q: Do you have any favourite songs?

MS: It's mostly country classics – Loretta Lynn, Patsy Cline, Skeeter Davis. But I also like rock and roll – CCR and Buddy Holly and Elvis. I do sing a little bit of Bob Seger and Johnny Cash.

Q: Would you like to sing a bar or two for us?

MS: Ok well another thing too. After I made my commitment, I was sitting at the Bedford Borough Park in Saskatoon and my boys were running around. I used to write poetry, I used to do poetry. I was sitting there contemplating my life and my relationship with God, and words were coming to me. I thought, oh a poem. But the words started to change into music, so all of a sudden it's like lyrics. I'm like, this is not a poem, this is a song. I didn't have any paper, and my boys were running around. They know me. I said, okay you guys, we gotta go home, I have a song coming and I need to go home and write it down. So we went home. I sat down with a piece of paper and a pen, and within 20 minutes I had the song put together. It was called "I'll Never Be the Same Again". I have sung that song at churches a few times already. I've given my testimony at Tribal Trails. So I've been on Tribal Trails, I gave my testimony; they put me on for two shows. I spoke about my life before and my life after. But the song was called "I'll Never Be the Same Again", so I can sing that if you want.

MS: I lay in the dark of night, a lump of clay before the potter.

He came in the spirit of light, like rivers of living water.

He reached in my inner closet, in the depth of my heart and soul.

There's no doubt about it, he touched me and made me whole.

I'll never be the same again

He reached down and took the pain

I'll never be the same

No I'll never be the same again.

I now have a change of heart, by his spirit I've been restored.

A new life, a new start; thanks be to God, my father, my Lord.

He set my feet on solid ground, he healed me through and through.

By his spirit I have found he can do the same for you.

You'll never be the same again

He'll reach down and take the pain  
You'll never be the same  
No you'll never be the same again.  
I'll never be the same again  
He reached down and took the pain  
I'll never be the same  
No I'll never be the same again.  
No I'll never be the same again.  
No I'll never be the same again.

Q: When you mentioned being scheduled for three or four clients at the same time, how does that work? How long do you take with each client?

MS: Just two weeks ago, I had five clients at 8 o'clock. I thought, how am I going to do this? I phoned the clients and said, can I come at 7 or 7:30? Most of them are like, ya sure. I made it to my first client at 7:30. So you drive there, you do whatever you need to do; it could take about 10 minutes. You jump in your car and drive to the next client. I think I made it there at 7:50 to my next client. Then I did what I needed to do there, then I had to be at 8:20 at the other client and then maybe 8:45 at the other client. It doesn't always go easy. Maybe they didn't answer the buzzer right away or they're not home and you have to phone on-call and say, I'm not getting an answer. It's not always bang bang and you go in and do whatever and leave; it doesn't always happen that way. Or the client may be having a problem with something where they need help to do something else, so you might be there for 20 minutes instead of 10. But that night I think I finished at about 9, so I did my 8 o'clock but I started at 7:30 and finished at 9. I didn't get home until 9:30 that night. It's hard. On weekends when I'm working, I could see two clients at 8 o'clock and then somebody at 10 and then somebody at noon. I might have three for lunch visits. They don't say, 12 be here and 12:30 be here and 1 o'clock be here, they say 12 o'clock three visits. So you have to try to work it out and plan.

Q: What is the company telling the clients about when you're going to be there?

MS: A lot of the clients say, okay you were supposed to be here at 8 o'clock. Well I'm sorry, but I had three visits for 8 o'clock, so I'm unable to be here. I cannot do three clients at the same time. Most of them are understanding. Sometimes they'll call the office and say, is someone coming in? Then they'll call me on-call and say, are you on your way or have you seen so-and-so yet? I'm like, well I'm on my way, yes I'm almost there, but I had to go see this other client. So it's very stressful.

Q: Does the company have any systems in place to protect you, such as checking in before and after appointments, etc.?

MS: Right now we have a phone where we call in, it's like logging in and logging out. We are on a tracker type thing so they do know where we are. We phone in and say, okay this is where I'm at, then when you leave you log out. Sometimes I even forget to log out. There's supposed to know. If you don't log out, I mean I didn't log out for three hours because I had seen one client and then I went to see another client in between, then I went to see her again. But when I went to see her at 8 o'clock I noticed that I didn't log out at 5 o'clock. It shows that I've been there, according to that, three hours, which didn't happen. But I thought they were supposed to say, okay this is for your safety purposes; if you still haven't left a client, then it'll be our concern so we'll contact you to make sure everything's okay. But nobody contacted me, even if I did forget to log out. Another thing they have in place is a thing called Jasper. If you're in a situation at a client's place and you're feeling that you're at risk, you're supposed to call the office and say Jasper, and then they're supposed to ask you questions and you say yes or no. They say, can you leave? Then you say no or whatever. But when you call on-call, because they're not getting an answer at the client's, you're on hold. I'm like, well how can that help if you're going to call for Jasper, and you're put on hold for 15 minutes? I don't feel very safe with that. It's like you're taking your life in your hands, depending on where you go.

Q: Is there anything else?

MS: There's also a situation where you may see a client and there might be like a clash immediately. The client is treating you like crap or they're swearing at you or yelling at you.

When you phone in, like I have had to phone in a few times and say, okay one time I phoned in crying because the client was just so belligerent and yelling at me and making me feel like I totally didn't know what I was doing. She was swearing and just putting me down. I phoned the office and told them what happened; actually it wasn't the office, it was on-call. They said, oh sorry to hear that, we'll put you on the don't send list so that they won't send you there again. But sometimes if you phone in and say, I don't want to go see this client and I'd rather not have to deal with this client, you have to be careful. If you say you don't want to go see someone, then they'll put you on a list that you're not cooperative or you're not doing your job. You have to kind of make sure that you have good reason. I've never actually said that I don't want to go see that person, I've always said, this is what happened. Usually they'll say, okay we'll put them on your don't send list. Or else, we heard from the client and the client said this. It's such a gray area because you don't know whether they believe you or whether they listen to the client more than they listen to your thoughts. I don't know what is on my record, I don't know what they have. But I talked to my supervisor about this last week and said, I must have a mile long don't send list. She said it's not me, I'm not the one saying that I do refuse; I'm not refusing to see a client. She said, it's better for us on our end to say, well we won't send you there again. Whether it's because of the client or because of me or depending on whatever happened, they will not send me back to that client. So I do have a little bit of support there, but I still have to be careful that I'm not the one that's refusing to go see that client. I think it's important to document this and write down, okay I went and saw so-and-so and this is what happened, sort of like an incident report. Another thing too, I just had an experienced with a guy. I went to see him on Sunday morning, and I feel that he was like a sexual gesture. I felt like something happened that he kind of went over the line. So I did call in and said, this is what happened and this is how I felt. I didn't call in on-call because when I called on-call there was another client that was coming to the door with just his underwear on. I had called on-call about that saying, every time I go see him he comes to the door with his underwear. I said, I feel uncomfortable. He didn't feel like he really understood – so what's the problem, what are you calling about? I said, I just feel uncomfortable, I just have an uncomfortable feeling every time I have to go see him. So they said, okay I'll report it, I'll document it, and we'll leave it at that. So because that incident happened a couple weeks ago with that guy, I didn't want to phone on-call because I didn't feel that he would understand or they would really care. But I did report it and I talked to

my supervisor about it and she said, oh my gosh, I'm so sorry that that happened, and we'll definitely put him on a don't send list. It's set in place where there is some protection type of thing, but it's not. . . What if it had gotten worse? What if something would've happened on that Sunday morning and I wasn't able to call? It's so risky.

[ END ]