



Kathleen Andrews: Edmonton’s “First Lady of Transit”

Kathleen Andrews was the first woman bus driver with the Edmonton Transit System (ETS) - and the first woman in a non-traditional job with the City of Edmonton. She later became the first woman to be a dispatcher and then the first woman in ETS management.

Kathleen Andrews (nee Smith) was born in Rochdale, England in May 1940, the daughter of a transit driver, who taught her how to drive. At the age of 14, her family boarded the Queen Mary bound for Canada, ending up in Edmonton where she completed high school, married, and had two children. She worked in the home until she and her husband divorced in 1970. In order to support her family, Kathleen sought paid employment, eventually landing a job as an Information Clerk with ETS in 1975. But \$3.00 per hour was not enough to support her family, so within five months she applied for, and passed the height and strength requirements to become ETS’s first woman transit driver. Her hourly wage more than doubled to \$7.50, which was on par with male drivers.

Being the first and only woman transit driver with ETS was not without its challenges. Kathleen faced resistance from male co-workers and from passengers of both genders, some of whom actually refused to get on her bus. The hours of work were very long and irregular. She eventually applied for and was hired as a dispatcher – another first for a woman with ETS – which gave her routine hours and weekends off. Three years later, she became a Special Services charter officer, making her the first woman in ETS management. She retired in 1997 but continued to drive school buses.

Kathleen’s daughter, Lisa Andrews, who also ended up working with ETS as did her brother Brad, tells how her mother overcame resistance to being a woman working in a non-traditional role:

One story I recall was she was driving the bus late at night and a lady got on the bus and said to her, ‘If you knew what was best for your children, you would be at home looking after them and not taking a job from a man.’ She turned to this lady and said, ‘You know what? I do know what’s best for my children. That’s why I’m sitting in this seat, busting my butt so that I can bring home an income that can give them a home to grow up in and education and I can feed them.’ After that conversation, the woman became her best friend and late at night she’d bring her coffee and sandwiches. So she won the respect of this woman.

Kathleen Andrews passed away on 17 November 2013. In 2014, the City of Edmonton announced that the new 500,000 square foot transit garage being built in north Edmonton would be named the Kathleen Andrews Transit Garage, and that three roads in the Ambleside neighbourhood will be named in her honour: Andrews Loop, Andrews Way and Andrews Gates.

Kathleen Andrews reminisces about her first union meeting when she was the only woman member of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 569:

At one union meeting, the first one, at the Masonic Lodge, I remember so well all these men around me. And the speaker said, ‘Fellow Brothers and...Sister.’ And everyone turned around to look at me. Well, I laughed.

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Kathleen Andrews

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• First woman in any non-traditional job with the City of Edmonton

• First woman ETS dispatcher

• First woman in management at ETS

