

Zonia Wuschenny

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Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Camera: Ron Patterson

Q: Tell me about your background.

ZW: I was born and raised in Saskatchewan. My parents were farmers. My grandparents on both my mother and my dad's side came from the Ukraine. Dad came from the Ural area in eastern Ukraine, and mother's family came from the Klimahora area in the Ukraine, I think it's towards the west. They had the farming background in Europe and so the grandparents just brought that experience with them. They settled in the Yorkton area in Saskatchewan and they homesteaded. One of my grandparents, because he had been in the military in Europe, he received two quarters of land instead of the regular one quarter of land. So I guess he must've been some high officer or something, to received two quarters of land. I was the youngest in a family of 12. Both my mom and dad were very supportive of the social system in Saskatchewan, the CCF government. Having a large family, they were happy when the Saskatchewan health plan came in. So that's basically where my support for the health system came in. Coming from an area where they were mostly European settlement, it brought a lot of communities together of different ethnic backgrounds. I graduated from school in 1965, came to Edmonton, went to college. In 1966 I got a job with the City of Edmonton in the assessment and tax collection area. My first exposure to the union was we had a shop steward who also happened to be a trustee, Peter Stesik. He got me involved in the union movement. I started in September and I believe it was about November when he came and said, well Mr. Hawrelak gave us an increase last night of 1% in our salary. I thought, wow, 1% is a lot of money. I was making \$90 biweekly before deductions at that time, so 1% took me up to \$100 bi-weekly.

Q: What do remember about Edmonton when you arrived 45 years ago?

ZW: It was a smaller city, very friendly. People could get around with just the trolley system or the propane buses. A lot of the shops were on Jasper Avenue. When I arrived we still had not been exposed to shopping malls. A couple of years later, I believe Bonnie Doone was the first one, or Westmount. Then downtown Edmonton just started dying off. The malls came in and people stopped using the trolley buses, starting buying cars, and not shopping downtown anymore. We had stores, like Woodward's, that had everything in there; a little coffee bar and a beautiful courthouse. That was gone, demolished. So it was a friendly city.

Q: What was it like for a young girl?

ZW: I'd gone to college, I had family here already, a sister and a brother were living in Edmonton. So they were able to take me around to places. I'd gone to college where I'd made some friends with some people. We would go to the various different restaurants and the odd bar. But it was very friendly, you didn't have to worry about being mugged or anything at that time. People really were supportive.

Q: What was Peter Stasiuk like?

ZW: A great guy. He was a trustee of the union and he was my boss as well, a real nice guy. People-orientated, helped the people, especially the fellows. Payday he would loan them some money, then they would give it back to him. He really treated us well. He bought us donuts when we worked overtime. He was a great guy. When he accepted a senior position, that took him out of the union and into management. But because he had been so good to the union when he was an executive member, we gave him an honorary life membership in the union. When we went on strike in 1976 he was our inside information person.

Q: Tell me about the tax collection department.

ZW: We were situated in the old City Hall where the new City Hall now is. I believe that was built in 1953 or '54. William Hawrelak was the mayor at that time. We were situated on the main floor of the building. We had three entrances into there. When I came in there was about 60 people on that floor. I had never seen so many people in one place at one time. But the people were very friendly, and being the junior person, I did a lot of gofer jobs, go for this and go for that. That way you got to learn the job. My first job was on a big transfer postage machine, where the tax roll paper was fed into the machine and you press the lever with your foot and it moved the paper ahead and stamped the payment on an 8-1/2 x 11 card. That was our tax roll at that time. Very friendly. Once a month we had a bit of a social, coffee and donuts. I'm not sure if people were more stressed at that time, but even the taxpayers seemed to be a bit more friendly. The thing that amazed me was, although Peter was a real nice fellow, but gosh he was in charge of the supplies. In order to get a pencil we had to return our little piece of pencil in order to get a new one. Although he was very kind, he was kind of cheap as well. A lot of us would just go to Woodward's and buy our own pencils so we didn't have to go begging for a pencil from him.

Q: Was the social aspect connected to the union? Was the union present?

ZW: It really wasn't present except that Peter happened to be a trustee and we sort of associated this with the union, but it was more Peter himself. He had come from a small community and he understood that if you wanted production from the employees you treated them properly. It meant a lot to him to know a little bit about each one of us, and he appreciated our stand. He would come each morning, make his rounds. He knew a little bit about everyone. He did time check as well and we didn't even realize he was really checking our attendance. What he had done was he used to come and say good morning to everyone on the floor. Like I said, he knew a little bit about everyone. This actually was his time attendance as well, checking on who was there and who wasn't. We didn't really even know he was doing it that way, but at the end of the day we said, gosh he did two things here. One is he says, how are you? and then he also did his time check that you turned up for work.

Q: Things were pretty strict in those days. How would you compare it to today's attitude?

ZW: I think the strictness came from some management people that had actually served in the Second World War. They brought that military background with them. But you learned to listen to them. Myself, I was brought up to respect the elders, so I listened to them and respected them. But as time changed, different managers came in and it was more relaxing. Now it's, depends where you go, I think people try to work because at the end of the day we're all working for the same corporation. But it was that mentality for maybe 20 years before a lot of that military background people retired.

Q: What changes did you see over the years in the taxation unit?

ZW: We were one of the last departments to move out of the old City Hall before it was demolished and a new construction came in. When I first started in 1966, all the departments except Edmonton Telephones were working out of City Hall. Edmonton Telephones just happened to be across the street in a white building just west of the library. So it housed all the departments, including Edmonton Power, Law, everyone was in that one building, plus a cafeteria we had on the 9th floor. That's where the union meetings were held, in the cafeteria on the 9th floor. It was easy to get to the meetings because you just had to stay for a little while, then just pop up the elevator and go to the meeting. The meetings started at 7 o'clock at that time, not 5:30 like they do now. So you got to meet the janitors, waiting for that period of time. I'm not sure how we got the janitors, but they were part of 52 I guess. A lot of them were from European background and a lot of them spoke Ukrainian or Polish, so it was easy to communicate with them. If you needed a vote you'd just say, come and vote on this issue.

As far as work, we had the old typewriters, the old adding machines where if you needed to multiply you put in the digits, put the lever down, and half an hour later you got your result. Adding was okay but multiplication, you had this big lever you pulled down. If you needed to multiply 10 times you'd pull the handle down 10 times. A lot of work, mapping was done by hand. Big ledgers about 3 feet by 3 feet were kept on tax notices. Then it went onto these cards later on. Subdivision plans were humungous big plans you had to look at. Manual pencil sharpeners, on every little workstation you had a pencil sharpener screwed into the windowsill. When the first electric pencil sharpener came it was like a toy, everybody was sharpening their pencils.

Q: Which groups, besides janitors, were in the union?

ZW: Just about everyone was. The only ones that were out of the union were the actual, I guess today the equivalency would be a coordinator. But everyone else was in there except your general manager was out. His secretary was not in a union but the secretary was out of scope. But other than the managers in that union, which I think there were four in my area, everyone else was a 52 member.

Q: Which occupations?

ZW: Assessors, tax collectors, business tax, and clerical. So all those were part of 52. It didn't matter what level of work you were doing, you were 52 or you were a manager and general manager.

Q: Were there several employers back then in 52?

ZW: No, there wasn't. There was only two employers, three employers. There was what you call the main, which is the City of Edmonton, and the public library and the health unit. Edmonton Telephones in around the early '80s went on as a separate contract, but they were part of 52. So basically there were just the three: the main, which included telephones, and the library, and the department of health. Power was part of 52 but there were different components in power. There was 1007, who had the electrical workers and linemen, and everyone else was 52.

Q: Over the years, you lost certain occupations.

ZW: We lost certain occupations. We lost telephones when they went on their own as a separate bargaining unit. We lost Power; they went as a separate bargaining unit. We actually gained one in the mid '80s, which is now the TELUS World of Science, which was the Edmonton Space Foundation, they still are the Space Foundation. They were part of the planetarium at that time, they were part of Parks. So they went as a separate entity, a foundation. We lost them from the main but we gained them as a separate contract. The same thing happened with telephones. Then what happened was we actually lost the health department because there was a raid in our union by another outside union. So we lost the bargaining unit of the health.

Q: To which union?

ZW: I can't remember what it was, but it was just a small one. Then in 1989 or 1990 we lost the janitors to union 30. There was no raid, it was just a petition that the janitors had signed, they said they wanted to rightfully go to union 30 because that's where they felt they belonged. So it was just a vote and it was about 60%. They were just flipped over.

Q: What was the union like when you first became active?

ZW: Peter Stasiuk sold me my union membership card, it cost \$2 at that time. The process of being sworn in as a member, you had to attend a general meeting and the president swore all the members in in front of everyone, whoever had signed up to become a union member. I remember standing in front of everyone. Alex Josey was our president at that time, 9th floor City Hall, about 15 or 20 of us standing up in front and swearing allegiance to the union. That basically was my first exposure speaking in front of a bunch of people. I spoke to some people, but not really. The cafeteria was just full of members of 52. That was part of the process that's not there anymore. You just get a union card and you don't have to go swear allegiance when you get a new card. The only time you swear now is if you go on a committee or an executive, then you do an oath. But that was neat, I think we should go back to that.

Q: What about paying dues, was it like it is today?

ZW: The system was there the same as it is now, it's an automatic deduction. Whatever the membership had voted on, it just automatically was taken off your pay stub. The only thing you had to pay for was \$2 for a membership card, and that gave you the rights to vote and attend certain functions like Xmas parties for the children, different events that the union had. I'm not sure if we got that much of a discount, but you could only go to these things if you had a union membership card. But the voting definitely was there, you had to have a card to vote.

Q: How did your union activism develop?

ZW: How it developed was that across from my office the utility department was on the same floor. A fellow by the name of Lloyd Egan was working in the utilities department. He was a trustee as well. We had lots of our work between the two areas. They would collect utilities, sometimes we had to put it on the tax roll if they were behind. So Lloyd often came and visited with Peter and got to know the rest of us. So actually both Lloyd and Peter were the ones that encouraged me to start attending the meetings. A couple of the meetings these people were saying this should happen and that should happen. If you're new, you don't know too much at that point. They always seemed to have their own different opinions there.

Then I got involved on the Employee Rights Committee. That was my first exposure to sitting on a committee. The Employee Rights was there to watch out for the employees, if there was anything that was a detriment to them or suggestions to improve. One thing my committee did come up with was we recommended to the executive to go to the City of Edmonton and recommend that the pay stubs be put into an envelope. At that time the paymaster or pay clerk would just come around and put your check on your desk, and everybody could see what you were getting or not getting. So the City was receptive to the idea and they started putting them into envelopes. So the pay clerk would just hand you your envelope and people walking by had no idea what you were getting in there.

Q: What was in the envelope?

ZW: A cheque with a pay stub.

Q: Do you remember any union issues at that time?

ZW: We were part of CUPE at that time because when I started in 1966, I believe in '61 or '62 union 52 had had a vote and they voted to join CUPE national. There always seemed to be some controversy with this national CUPE that we weren't getting representation, or we felt we weren't getting enough representation. We had to have our business agents, we had to have a lawyer, and we were still paying per capita to CUPE national. It seemed like CUPE national in Toronto was calling all the shots, telling us what we ought and ought not to do.

Q: Do you remember any specific issues?

ZW: Yes, I do. One of the issues that came to our general membership was, Lloyd Egan was the president already, and he said that the unfairness of the per capita that we were paying was not the same, across Canada CUPE was not paying the same formula. It appeared like Western Canada was paying more than some unions down east. The executive on CUPE national was from down east, Toronto area, Stan Little and Gracie Hartmann. Why that was, no one could find the answer. Why we were paying more per capita than these groups down east. So our union executive began to get active in that and started attending CUPE national conventions. One of the big issues that came about was CUPE national wanted to enforce a bylaw that would take the rights away from the trustees. Trustees had a vote at that time, on executive board. They were executive members and had a vote. CUPE national wanted to put a bylaw in where anyone who held the position of a trustee would not have a vote. You could have voice but no vote on an executive. At that time politics started to come in, splinter of executive, where people said, gosh, darn it, we need these trustees, we need the vote. There was a big opposition to CUPE national trying to impose that bylaw.

Q: Could you describe what a trustee was?

ZW: A trustee of the union was and still is where you look at the books and make sure that, the financial books that is, and make sure that everything is spent correctly and motions have been made and your bank statements are balanced and that there's two signatures on the cheques and proper receipts are kept to verify what has been spent and to make recommendations along with the treasurer. That's basically what the trustees were doing at that time and still do basically the same thing, but they're also part of the executive. We had three at that time and we still have three positions for trustees.

Q: How did you become more involved in the union?

ZW: I was on the Employee Rights Committee, my first year. It seemed people in the union were looking for members, and it was either get elected or volunteer. I believe I volunteered for that committee. Then the following year, in 1967, there an opening for shop stewards in my area. Assessment tax collection had three positions available. Peter Stasiuk at that time had to step down because he was being promoted into a management position. He had to step down, so that created three positions up for election. I was nominated by Peter, and Paul Hawyrishko and Steven Sumka Jr. The three of us became shop stewards. Gradually I started getting more involved in the union, attending meetings and volunteering for positions.

Q: What was it like to be a shop steward at that time?

ZW: What that meant was you had to come back after your general meeting or shop stewards meeting and report what had happened. We didn't have the paper flow, it was verbal. We didn't even have a shop steward bulleting board at that time. Like I said, other than maybe four or five people in the department, everyone else was 52. The ones that had been in management had been 52 to start with at one time. That helped management too, because they got to know what was happening. You basically reported back to your members what had transpired the night before, what was being discussed, negotiations. It wasn't as secretive as it is now. Proposals were brought to the membership. If the president and the negotiating committee were negotiating a contract, we knew what articles were being presented for negotiations. Now it's so secret that you have no idea what's being presented unless you're on the negotiating committee. People had an opportunity for input, to make suggestions. If it was a suggestion that wouldn't work, the president or someone on the executive said, look, it's not a good idea, or we tried it, or something like that. We felt more was being communicated to us at that time, maybe because there was more trust out there towards central personnel, which is human resources now. And we had different administration. We had Mr. Hawrelak as our mayor; he didn't want to drag things on in contracts. He was a person who said, I've only got so much money and this is it, folks. We've got to sit down and come up with a solution. So everyone seemed to be happy. People were glad to have a job, I guess. If you had honesty coming at you from the City, saying, we only so much money, the books were open to us and so we knew there was nothing being hidden or anything like that.

Q: How does that compare to today?

ZW: Well today we're not, well a lot of it, in my opinion I feel, is not forthcoming. There's this panic out there or whatever you want to call it, we have no money, we have no money. But then on the other hand, council votes for things and all of a sudden they have the money. So I'm not sure if there's 100% exposure with us. I think it's not quite all there. Creative accounting maybe, I'm not sure.

Q: What was the union doing for its members at that time (in the '60s)?

ZW: Lots of negotiations and social functions. They kept us informed of how things were happening with the City. It seemed at that time that our president, whichever ones they were, seemed to have a good working relationship with the mayor and the Commission Board, because we had a Commission Board at that time. I think they tried to communicate that, and as the city was growing, we needed more workers. The city started to expand, and as a

result 52 started getting more members. We were to a point of about 6,500 members at one point, about the mid-'70s. So it really grew.

Q: Do you recall any collective bargaining gains?

ZW: One of the big victories was in the mid 1970s, when 52 was successful in one of the big negotiating contracts. We got a maternity leave for our women. Prior to that there was no maternity leave in Canada let alone Alberta. The women actually had to quit their jobs. If they were pregnant they had to quit their jobs, not take leave, because there was no leave. Quit their jobs, and if they wanted to come back they actually had to be rehired, not necessarily into the same position. So union 52 was successful in getting a six month maternity leave, which now is across Canada, and it's up to 12 months now. But we were I believe the first ones in Alberta to get that in our collective agreement.

Q: Was there any opposition to that?

ZW: Of course there was. There was opposition to that because it was something that was new. It was felt that, well gee, why should we keep your job? You're not working for us, why should we keep your job for you? The clause was that you were granted up to six months maternity leave and you were guaranteed a position upon your return, not necessarily the position that you vacated, but you were guaranteed a position of the same level. That meant if you were Clerk II you came back as a Clerk II. Of course there was opposition because they said, oh gee, we have to keep this position open; we'd like to fill it up with somebody. And some managers did try that. But at the end of the day they still had to produce a job or create a job for the person coming back from maternity leave.

Q: Was there debate in the union meetings?

ZW: We were happy about it. There was no opposition in the union meetings; in fact, that's when women started to become more active in the union, because of that particular clause.

Q: So how did you develop, from being a shop steward in 1967?

ZW: I went on different committees, not on the executive, but I went on different committees, served on different committees. Like I said, Employee Rights was one of them. I became a sergeant at arms. One of the things I do remember is we had a bit of an internal dispute on the executive at that time. Two executive members were supporting CUPE national and some weren't. One of our members in the audience just did not like one of the executive presidents, so she basically physically went and unplugged the microphone. This was old City Hall, it was sort of like a circle. You were at the back by the elevators. So she unplugged the microphone and Lloyd Egan asked the sergeant at arms to maintain control. Everybody didn't know what to do. He asked us, the sergeant at arms, there were two of us, to remove the person who had caused the unplugging of the microphone. So we were chasing this person, trying to apprehend her, take her down the elevator, to remove her from the meeting. We had respect at that time, regardless of what you said. You may not like it but you just don't go and unplug the microphone because you don't like the person. Then in 1976 we had a strike vote. I was on the committee that allocated strike funds. When we got back from the strike, we were on strike for 14 days. You supported the union. Even though I wasn't supportive of the time that the strike was called and the issues, but you still supported the union.

Q: What led to that strike?

ZW: CUPE national, like I said, we belonged to CUPE national. I guess CUPE national would send its representatives to work with our negotiating team. One of them was Fred Pike. Fred Pyke had a lot of friends down east, he had a lot of clout, as they say. He was very, his negotiating skills I thought were lacking. He didn't have the charisma. He was confrontational. As a result, the City negotiators at that time just were not cooperating with him, or felt they couldn't cooperate with him, couldn't get any clauses through. As a result, meetings were called and said, the City's not giving us this and the City's not giving us that, we're not going to take this anymore, we're going to stand up. As a result, we'd already had a manager, Alex Sczechina was our business manager at that point. It was most unfortunate Alex Sczechina had a confrontational thing as well with the City chief commissioner and personnel. As a result, when you have two people that are sitting on one side, you're not going to get much from the other side. Anyway, they had meetings and said, we're not being offered much, this is what we're offered. We can't take this, cost of living is going up.

At that time things were going up in Canada. It was blossoming all over Canada and people were looking for more money. Housing was starting to go on the uprise. When you have two eloquent speakers that use words like marmalade for jam, you're pretty well convinced that we've got to support this. We voted for strike and we were on strike for 14 days. We came back and the contract hadn't even been signed yet, and a prime minister puts in wage and price control. Rolls us back, and we find out that what had been offered to us, we could've had that. We got less than what we got, so this is what actually turned a lot of people off. There was a lot of bad feelings because of the strike. Alex Sczechina had a difficult time with the City administration. We found that things were just not working, so we had a movement in the executive and the union to dispense with our business manager's position. The City just wasn't dealing with us in any aspect at all. So a motion was made at the executive level to do away with the business manager, Alex Sczechina, terminate his contract. The vote was there at the executive level, then went to the general membership and it was supported. So we were fighting a battle with Alex Sczechina, because he took us to court for unfair dismissal. We're trying to reinstate our working relationship with the City of Edmonton, because it caused bad feeling. We had some people who crossed the picket line, we had managers doing union 52 work, so we had to get back on a working relationship with the City. Alex took us to court; he was not successful in his dismissal. We paid him out. Ironically, he was hired by the City of Edmonton a couple of years later into a management position. He was on leave from the City of Edmonton and that's part of the contract clause, where if you no longer are in a union position you do have the right to revert back to a City employee, something like the maternity leave. The employer has to give you a position. So he actually went back to the planning department for a couple of years, then he applied and got, of all places, he was working in the human resources department. So we had our nemesis there. Every time we wanted to have something, he was always in opposition against it. But thank goodness we had a working relationship with some of the other people in administration who were able to hopefully help us out.

Q: Was this all happening at the same time when people were getting unhappy with CUPE?

ZW: What happened was, in 1976 we were on strike. We asked for assistance from CUPE. They didn't give us any assistance. Like I said, we were on strike for 14 days, and we were paying per capita to CUPE at that time. CUPE national had the audacity to charge us for a full month's per capita for the period of time that we were on strike. So I think that was the

straw that broke the camel's back as far as 52 was concerned. We were very upset with that. The majority of the membership felt that the strike ought not to have been called. It was a bad time, it was October, Thanksgiving. The other thing was to roll back ? wages. The members blamed Fred Pike because he was the CUPE rep. A referendum was called in March of 1977 to sever our relationship with CUPE national. It was something like 95% to sever our relationship with CUPE national. They took us to court, we countersued. They wanted more money from us. They said we were cheating them on our per capita. It dragged on and on, and finally the case was thrown out of court because the time had expired, 10 years or something like that. So it was never really resolved, and that's been a bad thing with CUPE. They belong to the Canadian Labor Congress, and once that happens everybody else of the locals get involved. You don't get these invites anymore to the House of Labor, because you fought this big national union. We said, that's fine, we'll be independent; and we've been independent since. After that separation, Alex Sczechina was getting to be a difficult person to work with at the union executive as well as with City. So we severed his relationship in 1981 or '82, I believe.

Q: What do you remember about Peter Sumka Jr.? He was working for the union at that time, wasn't he?

ZW: Yes, he was. In fact, Steve Sumka Jr. in 1976 was the treasurer, and Lloyd Egan was the president. At that time business agents were hired from 52 ranks. They did not belong to the Steel Workers like they do at the present time. So when a position was created or vacant, members of 52 could apply. It was a promotion. So what happened was a position for business agent was posted. We broke away from CUPE national so we needed more internal representation, so we created positions, business agents. Steve Sumka Jr. applied for the position. He was successful, so he resigned as the treasurer. In 1977 I got elected as a trustee. What happened was when Steve resigned as the treasurer, in the interim we were looking for a treasurer. I was nominated and elected interim treasurer for the period of time. Then the following year I got in as the treasurer. I was the treasurer for about eight years. From there I stepped down for a little while, went and got myself more education, went to university, Grant McEwan, and obtained human resources accreditation for that period of time. Then I was still a shop steward but not as active as I was, because what happened was Lloyd Egan had lost the presidency and Frank Zaprawa came in. Him and I just weren't getting along, so I stepped back and got myself my human resources accreditation, benefits, you name it. When Frank lost the election Shirley Wood got in, our first lady president. So I got re-involved in the union. Then in the early '90s I ran for the position of assistant chief shop steward. Then when the chief shop steward stepped down I was nominated for chief shop steward. That's the position I have right now.

Q: What kind of president was Lloyd Egan?

ZW: Lloyd had a way of working with people, whether you're in management or the union, he had a skill. He could go for lunch or breakfast with you and he was able to negotiate issues, resolve issues. He had a very good working relationship with management, particularly with governments. No one actually seemed to know which political party he supported, but he seemed to have friends in the Conservative party, the Liberal party, the NDP party. You name it, he had contacts with them. They trusted him. He was very concerned about the membership, always trying to get the best contract he could. In fact, he personally was involved in negotiations for what we called City of Edmonton contract,

which was the main. He treated the people with respect. You say, how did he lose the election? We had some opposition on the executive, we had new people come in. There was a change of attitude with some of our members out there. They felt that Lloyd had been in too long – he was in for 14 or 15 years – that his ideas were stale, that we needed more excitement. People started running for the position, they'd promise you the blue cheese on the moon. Well that's fine, but when you get into the office you're not going to accomplish that. Some of the executive members, I guess he stepped on some toes, so they started campaigning against him. As a result, it was a close vote and he lost by something like 80 votes. So he reverted back to the City of Edmonton as well.

Q: What about Shirley Wood?

ZW: I became active again when she became president. Frank was only in for two years. Shirley was elected October 1990, took office December 1, 1990.

Q: What was her platform?

ZW: She stood for equality. What happened was, for the period of time that Frank was in, it was quite a time. Members started getting wind of all the crazy spending that Frank was doing. When I had been the treasurer, we were successful in reaching our first million dollars. We had paid all our debts. We paid the debt on the union building, we purchased another property across the street, we had plans on building a social center. When Frank got in I lost the treasurer's position a year later, and it seemed that there was these people on the executive that the spending was crazy. Like lunches and cashing in our investments. Our savings were going down. People were not being represented properly. In fact, we lost an arbitration case where the City and the union were taken to the Labor Relations Board for lack of representation. A person was terminated in one of the departments, the City terminated him. The union didn't represent this person in a timely manner and, as a result, the person went to Labor Relations. The Labor Relations ruled against both the City and the union. The City had to give this person back the job and union 52 had to pay for one year's wages. Things like that happened. Yes, there were changes in the office, but still our people, that was one of the issues. So Shirley ran on the platform for changes to get back to common sense. It was a surprise, because no one thought that she was going to be successful.

Q: What kind of person was she?

ZW: She was a good person but she had very little union experience. You have to commend her, because no one was willing to stand up and run for that position at that time. To say she had the political will to say, yes I'll run; I may not get in, but I'm going to put my name in. Well surprise surprise, she got in. That splintered some of the executive members. At that time most of them were supporting Frank, so she had a very difficult time with the executive.

Q: So she didn't last for very long.

ZW: No, she actually did not complete her term. She only stayed in for about a year and a half; it was a two-year term. She resigned and there was a negotiation contract expired because she was given two years and so we had to pay her for the balance of her two-year period. So we had an interim president, Peter Nufie, for six months. Then in October there

was an election for president. There were three people running, and Gary Iskiw was successful.

Q: Did you any attend any functions of the Alberta Federation of Labor when you were in CUPE?

ZW: Yes, we attended Alberta Federation of Labor first. Larry Kostiuk was the president, I believe. We attended some in Edmonton and in Calgary. It seemed it was one year in Edmonton and one year in Calgary. I cannot remember them having their conventions elsewhere. At these conventions you elected the executive for the Alberta Federation of Labor. The solidarity song was sung and everybody was supportive. In Calgary when the conventions were held, the majority of the people stayed at the Palliser Hotel. From there you walked to the Husky Tower to restaurants, etc.. But in the convention center is where a lot of the conventions were actually held, or in a big hotel. So it was quite something. You had people from Alberta, resolutions, be it resolved that, be it resolved that, that seemed to be the lingo at that time. You had no idea what some of these resolutions really were. If you did your homework before, then you found out what was happening. Quite often it was resolutions that the Alberta Federation, and it seemed like the resolutions that always got passed were, hey we need more money, we need more money per capita. But Harry was very nice, he got along with everyone and he had a good working relationship with Lloyd. When we were with CUPE, conventions were held in Toronto or Vancouver, quite often Toronto. I didn't go to those; I did go to the CUPE Alberta conventions, and they were held in Edmonton or Calgary. Even schools they had, weekend schools for two or three days. Basically it was the same thing, a resolution passed, an executive elected. In my opinion, I don't think much was resolved at these conventions. I think it was just a party time. It's nice to meet people, but as far as resolving issues, never really got to find out what was happening in different places. But you were part of, you belonged to the House of Labor, so you were obligated to go to these places.

Q: Do you feel that union 52 was part of the labor movement, even though it's not in the Alberta Federation of Labor?

ZW: Yes, we are part of the labor movement. More unions out there have recognized 52 as being independent, and we've been able to obtain contracts, resolve issues, without giving a whole bunch of money to a national organization that calls the shots from down east. I think if the national organization was in western Canada then I believe more people would be more receptive to belonging to a big organization. But unfortunately, 43 years ago has not changed. CUPE national headquarters are still in Toronto, shots are being called from there. Vancouver is independent as well, the City of Vancouver. Not belonging to house and national, there's advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that you have more money in your coffers. The disadvantage is that sometimes you're not invited or included in the House of Labor. Canadian Labor Congress will not touch us, because we broke away from CUPE national. We haven't really pursued joining them, we just sort of made a couple of overtures and they said, sorry, we don't recognize unions that broke away from another group. But as far as, because we represent City of Edmonton, and EPCOR and Space Sciences and the libraries, other than Calgary EPCOR we really don't represent anyone else. And Calgary EPCOR are a part of the Edmonton EPCOR headquarters. With the number we have, it works well for us to be independent. We have our own business agents. We can

plan, we don't have to run an issue through another party. If we have issues out there, we can resolve them rather quickly, or try to resolve them rather quickly.

Q: You've cooperated quite a bit with other unions.

ZW: Yes we have. We do work with other unions, we recognize them, it's their decision. Union 30 belongs to CUPE national, but we don't hold that against them. We have a coalition.

Q: Tell me about the coalition.

ZW: The City of Edmonton coalition represents all the people except the police in the city of Edmonton. Common issues like negotiations for benefits, you can go in as a group and try and negotiate benefits. We have a liaison officer that watches what's happening in council, reports back to the presidents of each union. 52 belongs to the coalition union 30, the fire, transit union, and there's a nursing group. It's much better. When the coalition was formed it took some pressure off. You were guaranteed that no one was going to raid you, that we had respect for each other's unions. We would negotiate if there were positions that we felt ought to really belong to 52 or 30 or whatever, it was negotiated internally. So it took a lot of that pressure off, not looking over your shoulder all the time that somebody was going to raid you. Unfortunately, the labor movement is sometimes not very pleasant. As a number, you're looking at 10,000 employees, it's strength in numbers when council is looking at something. You share ideas, like negotiations, you share ideas. You say, gee, we were offered whatever percentage, what were you offered? It works well.

Q: Have you been able to influence City Council on any of its decisions?

ZW: A couple issues. One was when Edmonton Telephones were going up for sale, we worked as a group of unions to stop that sale. We weren't successful, but we worked as a group. Another issue was the sale of EPCOR a couple of years ago. Council wanted to sell EPCOR, and as a coalition we banded together and were successful. We won the vote by one, so that was a close one. Unfortunately, when we tried to save Gold Bar we lost by one. It always helps in numbers. That's basically the issues belonging to a coalition, sharing ideas and knowing what's happening with the unions.

Q: Why would employees be against the selling of City's assets.

ZW: The issue is I believe the fact that you're selling something that you as an employee worked hard. You're a taxpayer as well, if you're living in the City of Edmonton your tax dollars have gone to preserve jobs for the people. They've seen it grow from a small organization to a big organization. And the fact that privatization is scary because it does away with jobs. The bottom line on prioritization is profit. As a civic or city employee, they feel that the city assets really ought not to be profits, it's a service to the people and the taxpayers should have a say in what's happening. Unfortunately, the taxpayers have not been exposed to a referendum on things. Council just seems to not care or they figure, we're elected, we're going to do what we want; you elected us to make the decision. I think the fact is like Edmonton Telephones, when it was sold, the promise was, we're going to stay in Edmonton, we're going to stay in Edmonton. Well what happened? Edmonton was shut down and it's now in Burnaby, B.C.

Q: How were things going in the union at the time Mary was elected?

ZW: I supported Mary the first couple of terms, but unfortunately, the union is always putting out bush fires. Things are just moving so quickly out there. The telephone issue, EPCOR issue. In the council there's movement to either privatize services, and there's just a different breed of management people out there now. They're just not, they're saying to union people, is you do this and that's it. They're not willing to work with people. Their philosophy is different. I'm not sure if some of the management are profit orientated, they want profit at the end of the day and as a result if they have profit, that reflects on them. They get promotions, they're classified good management people. But it seems the union movement, I'm not sure it's because of what's happening in Canada or lack of what's happening in Canada. I know the issue a few years ago was it seemed like so many unions were going on strike. It made a bad impression on most people and they threw every union into that same type of impression. There are some darned good unions out there that to strike is the last issue, you don't want to go on strike, because everybody is affected by strike.

Q: Why is a chief steward and a steward such a valuable component in a union?

ZW: Your stewards are really, you're supposed to police your contract at work, represent your people. Your personal biases, put them to the side. If there's an issue on the floor, if you can't resolve it you contact the union office to try and get a resolution. Try and encourage the people to attend meetings and get involved. I know 52 as well as some other unions, we're at a position where it's the older people now are still with the union. As they retire, unfortunately, there's just not enough young people being involved. I'm not sure what's going to happen.

Q: What were some of the issues over the last 20 years, when you used your position as steward or chief steward to help the members?

ZW: One of the issues was where inequity pay was, where you apply for a position and you're successful and you're supposed to be given a three month probationary period. The person's in the job and the three months have gone by and four months have gone by and the person has not received a performance review. Management has been slow getting out of the gate to give these people a performance review. When they're jacked up they say, oh gee, I didn't have time to do it. I've had to contact the union office saying, look, this person's been at that job for three or four months, they ought to have received a performance review. If not, they're entitled to a step increase. So that's come back and management gets a little upset, oh we didn't have time to do it. Well that's not our problem, your problem is to manage. Other issues are on, you have to watch them, is on this 12 month temporary assignments. If you are in a temporary position for 12 months or more, you're not a permanent employee. But if you are in there for 12 months or more, then you become a permanent employee. Not necessarily in the position, but you'll become a permanent. I've had to contact the union on some of those as well, saying, look, these people belong to become a permanent employee. Well that doesn't go good with the managers, because they now have to have a permanent employee on the record, and give them a position somewhere. And some of it is trying to resolve issues between members. That's a tough one. Just crazy things, like, that's not my job, or this person is giving me this job to do and I don't think that's my job and I wasn't hired to do that. I guess you try and resolve those issues, see what it is that is your job and don't complain if it is your job. If it isn't, then let's try and resolve it.

Q: Were you involved in any difficult disciplinary or termination cases?

ZW: Not disciplinary, but layoff. That was a very difficult time. I was the shop steward in my area and the City was downsizing or trying to save some money on the budget. They had to cut their budget. One of the employees that was let go was being given papers that she was being terminated. Unfortunately, she was the least seniority person so she was being let go. That was a very difficult time. The manager and I and this employee, we were in that little room and we explained what was going on. I'd had prior knowledge already from the manager. He says, can you come with me. How do you deal with someone who's losing their job? They're distraught, they cry, and you try and sooth them. Yet at the end you know that management is following the collective agreement, because this is what it says, that basically the last one in is the first one to go. But here's a person that you know the job means everything to them. So those are very difficult issues. But what I learned to do when I became a shop steward is rarely do I go for coffee or lunch with someone from my floor. I found that if you stay away from these internal issues, then you can get the whole picture a lot better if something's happening on the floor. I go for coffee and lunch with people from other floors, but I try to stay away from that closeness so it isn't perceived that I'm favoring one employee over another.

Q: What is the relation of the chief steward to the other stewards?

ZW: Guide them, and if there are issues out there, to help them, support them. Ask them to do their job, treat the people with respect and don't get into any arguments, listen to both sides. That's hard for some people to do.

Q: Do any events from the early '90s stand out?

ZW: One of the things that has been very receptive are the negotiations for we call it earned days off. It's a morale booster, has been right from day one. We were able to negotiate, in most positions, you still work your number of hours, like for example I work 67-1/2 hours in a two week period. What we were able to do was negotiate where we can have, we still work 67.5 hours but 9 days instead of 10. That gives us that one extra day, and if you can take it on a Monday or Friday, it gives you a nice long weekend to do a lot of personal things. That's really a morale booster. To take that away would be gosh awful. That's something that we're really proud of. People look forward to that day. They work like crazy the day before to get their work done so there's nothing on their table. That's one of the big movements we did. And of course benefits as well. The health spending account is where each employee gets \$500 per year to spend on any medical thing, like prescriptions. The plan pays 80%, they'll cover the 20% for you. Glasses, whatever. That's another one, a big one. And of course the benefits, like the dental, that was a big move. We have where the employee pays 80% of the premiums and we pay the 20. That was a great movement because prior to that we had no dental plan at all and we had to pay our dental costs out of our own pocket.

Q: When did you get it?

ZW: That goes back to the early 1980s. Another one was long term disability. We had no long term disability plan. We had a sick plan, which the maximum was 520 days, depending which health category you were in. If you were hired and you had a health issue, then you were assigned one category. If you had an issue, you had some work done and you became an employee who didn't have as much illness, then you're put into another category. If you're

what you consider up your assessment as a healthy person, then you got a maximum of 520 days. That means if you were sick you could draw from those days. But the unfortunately part was if you had cancer and you used up your 520 days or whatever number you had, you had nothing. You were on sick but you weren't drawing any income. So the long term disability came in in 1991. Each employee pays a certain amount, it goes into this long term disability. So if you have a disability and you're off for a period of time, you would get a salary. That is one of the most important things. It's very costly, but it's a security. You don't have to worry about where your next paycheque is coming from.

Q: Has the union been able to ensure that the member's standard of living is maintained by wages increases?

ZW: I think the wage increases are good. Personally I feel that the benefits have fallen behind, as far as different things to be covered. For example, right now the province is thinking of taking the chiropractic care away. This is something that we don't have in our plan right now and I'm hoping that we can negotiate something like that. We do have some people who need those services. The deductibility as well. Eye glasses would be very important if we had, but we don't have that coverage. I think the wages are adequate, of course everybody wants more. But I think the benefits have not increased according to the costs.

Q: Tell me about this plaque.

ZW: The library yearly has what you call a fundraiser for people to come and have a silent auction. The funds are used for the library to purchase books and whatever. So they had a fundraiser on May 9th, this year, 2009. One of our executive members, Leo Derkach, attended the fundraiser. Knowing that we are looking for historical things, and the library is part of 52, so Leo was successful in getting the silent auction, or being the highest bidder on the silent auction to purchase this particular thing. The Chisholm block, 1913, that was the first library in the city of Edmonton.

Q: Where was the Chisholm block?

ZW: I'm not sure, but I suspect it was in the downtown core. Then the next one is the Strathcona Library, south side, 1913. Then there's the next one, which is the 1923 to 1966, which was I believe where the Westin Hotel is, but I may be mistaken. But it looks like the MacDonald is behind there. 1923 to 1966, and then the present current one is the Centennial Library, 1967, and that's just across from Churchill Square, south side of Churchill Square.

Q: Is the library a fairly active part of your union?

ZW: It is a fairly active part. We have a representative as well of shop stewards from the library. They negotiate their own collective agreement. It's a vital part and there's close to 450 members we represent in the library.

There was a convention for CUPE national that was held in Toronto October 22, 1975. We had representation from union 52, we had our business agent Alec Sczechina, our vice president Steve Sumka Sr., Paul Hawyrishko was our vice president as well. We had Alda Kowalchuk, who was our front office staff secretary, and Dianna Kristy was a member of one of the committees.

Q: What did that headline mean?

ZW: It says, all I did was provoke union ? after CUPE delegates boo were wage curb defense. That was to do with wage and price controls that were initiated by the federal government at that time. The unions were not very happy about that. Munroe, who was the minister at that time, was trying to defend the position of the federal government.

What we have here is a certificate where one of our members, Paul Harishko, attended a week long school at the Alberta Federation of Labor, and he was successful in receiving this certificate. It was on employee benefits, October 1974.

Q: Who was instructing the course?

ZW: George Holm was the instructor and the registrar was E. Mitchell. Paul has given us permission with his certificate. We see parliamentary procedures manual and union 52 does follow this one as well as all other unions. Union 52 uses the Munroe rules of order. This document gives you the parameters of how you should conduct your meetings. It doesn't matter if it's shop steward, general, or whatever, it gives you an outline of the proper process of conducting meetings.

Q: Why are unions so intent on following proper parliamentary procedure?

ZW: It's to maintain order and discipline at your meetings so that you don't have people wandering all over the board. The business is to be completed and done by the end of the meeting.

This is a document that was in one of our papers, our union communication papers that we have out to the membership. It was an old piece of news and it had the people that actually belonged to a life insurance plan. It was the Fair Share Society. This was a write up not only to do with the life insurance, but also some history on union 52.

Civic service union number 52 was chartered April 18, 1918 with the following members as signing officers: J.J. McCormack, President A.A. Campbell, Vice President A. Templeton, recording secretary and A.E. Dovey Secretary Treasurer. In those early days civic employees would who tried to form unions were in jeopardy of losing their jobs. In this day and age our local 52 would not be held in such high esteem had it not been for the foresight and courage of these early pioneers. The charter was granted under authority of the Trades and Labor Congress Council of Canada.

This is an application, the Societies Act and application for a life insurance called fair share for civic service union 52. At that time, which is June 1959, there was only a life insurance just with the City of Edmonton. There was no optional life insurance. In 1959 you had people that were coming back from the 2nd World War, or some didn't make it back. People were looking for security. The union felt that we could help our members by being part of a life insurance and it being optional for people, which gave them the extra insurance should something happen, disability or life insurance.

Q: Is this still around?

ZW: Unfortunately, no it's not. Due to lack of membership it was dissolved about five years ago.

This is a picture of one of our members who was playing Santa Claus. He was giving gifts away to the children at one of the parties.

Q: Was the party a regular function of local 52?

ZW: Yes it was and it still is. It's a yearly event where members can bring their children and themselves... This is one of our social functions that civic service union 52 holds annually. We also have a function in Calgary for our EPCOR people, but in Edmonton it's on a bigger scale because we have more members. We have an invitation to all members to participate, up to and including age 14 children. They come and Santa gives them out goody bags and they have a good time. This last year and the year before it was held in West Edmonton Mall. It's a very small charge, basically just a charge to make sure that the parents bring their children. It's subsidized by the union and it's very well appreciated.

Q: Why are social functions like that organized and subsidized by the union? How does it fit in the union's objectives to do this kind of thing?

ZW: It's part of our union activities that we feel that our members appreciate and actually are requesting that they become a family. How do you overcome that? By having functions where they can bring their families and socialize with each other. It's called the Members in Community Support Committee, and it's a committee that falls under union 52 Benevolent Society. Union 52 Benevolent Society is the actual holding company of Civic Service Union 52. All the chattels, all the equipment, the building, belongs to Union 52 Benevolent Society because unions in Canada cannot hold title to buildings.

In 1941 the City of Edmonton, by vote, approved a committee called Civic Employees Welfare Chest Fund. That was formed to help the widows and children of the 2nd World War, where they couldn't come back or were disabled, to help them with financial difficulties. As time went by it became part of all the different unions were part of it. Union 52 did belong to it up until 1980, then union 52 broke away and became independent. The reason for that was we had issues where more of our people needed assistance. When you belong to an organization that has a lot of people, you've got one vote, and the needs of your people are not met. So we broke away from them and formed our own charitable assistance fund. We were Civic Service Union 52 Employee Charitable Assistance Fund from 1980 until 1995.

At that time only 60% of the deduction you could claim on your income tax. Why that was was 60% under the law went to charitable organizations and 40% went to assistance for members, such as financial or support for post secondary education. Then Revenue Canada said, you need to have a referendum by your members. Legal counsel suggested that we terminate the Employees Charitable Assistance Fund and operate under Union 52 Benevolent Society as a committee, where you could use your union dues and members could claim 100% union dues under income tax. So basically it was the same thing. We had member assistance, bursaries to our members' dependent children, post secondary, as well as we still maintained donations to various charitable organizations, approximately 100 per year, like the Cancer Foundation, the Heart, Stollery Children's. We support Mustard Seed suppers, we prepare and serve and support Edmonton, Calgary, Marion Center for sandwiches, Bissell Center.

We support about 100 various organizations, predominantly in Edmonton, Alberta and Canada. We will support outside Canada, something like the Red Cross, but it has to be 100% guaranteed that it's going to go to those organizations. We do investigate them; we have applications. I think that's a very important thing, particularly our members who have

children that are going to college. We support each child for a total of \$1800 per child per lifetime for any post secondary education that they want. As well as our own members who find themselves in financial need. This is part of Union 52 Benevolent Society now. One quarter of one percent of the members' union dues are directed towards that. It falls under Union 52 Benevolent Society. It's part of the union dues, the structure. The members voted in 1995 to continue with one quarter of one percent of union dues to be strictly directed to that committee for that purpose.

Q: Why should unions support such an organization?

ZW: I'm on the history committee and I'm finding that unions, not only 52 but other unions, have not been diligent in maintaining records and pictures of their history. Without the help of other organizations like the Alberta Labor Institute, it would be difficult to get some of this history back. I would like to see it preserved for another 100 years at least.

Unfortunately, unions have not been doing it. We're 100 years old but it's tough going back and getting some pictures. I think it's an important organization. Another one is the Parkland Institute. They take issues that we're just too small to do ourselves, and the bigger picture is always helpful.

Prior to 1976 our union actually did not give out little gifts to our members. The executive in 1976 said, gee, we should maybe give something to our members at Xmas time. So we started giving out pocket calendars and ballpoint pens. So 1976 was our first year and in 1976 we were still part of CUPE national. So we had a pocket calendar that had our shop stewards and our general meetings. Then in 1977 we already were separated from CUPE. From 1978 to 1987 is the last year when I was secretary treasurer, that was the last one that I have. We have had them since each year, but that's the last one when I was the treasurer.

The pocket calendar served two-fold. One was it showed the dates of the general meetings and the shop steward meetings. Also it helped the members put little notes for themselves, there was room for personal notes, as well as a calendar. It had the name on it and you could just put it in your purse or pocket and it was handy. You didn't have to run to a calendar and see the dates. And the ballpoint pens we did. The first ballpoint pen we gave to our members was in 1984.

Q: What else did you give to your members?

ZW: It has changed from year to year, but basically we still give them pocket calendars and little knickknacks, but basically the calendars. They receive a union button when they become members. That's basically it.

[END]