

Cathy Owens & Amanda Hall

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Interviewer Winston Gereluk

Camera: Ron Patterson

CO: My name is Cathy Owens. I've worked at the Edmonton Public Library for 30 years. I've worked in many departments and I'm currently in the Centre for Reading and the Arts, semi-retired and picking up extra hours at the Woodcroft Library.

AH: My name's Amanda Hall. I've worked for the Edmonton Public Library for 20 years. I started off at the Londonderry Library for five years and now I work in Collection, Management and Access in the Stanley A. Milner Library and I catalogue the children's material.

Q: Tell us about your background.

CO: I was born in a little town outside Liverpool in England in 1947. I was born to a Catholic mother and Protestant father, and I feel I was born with political and religious arguments in the womb. I'm very pro-union, always have been and always will be. I came to Canada in 1971 for one year and ended up marrying a Canadian and living in Hamilton working at McMaster University for nine years. In 1980 my husband moved here to Edmonton and I started working at Edmonton Public Library and I've been there ever since. I'm semi-retired now and I have international students from Korea, Japan, China, Mexico and all over the world living at my home.

AH: I grew up on the Isle of Man in Great Britain, which is an island between England and Wales. It has its own government and parliament, although there's a representative of the queen that lives there. It also has its own language, the Manx language, but not many people speak it now although they're trying to get children in school to learn it. That's my nationality – on my passport it says that I'm Manx. Well I have two passports. Also the Isle of Man didn't join the common market; they decided not to do that. It's an offshore banking centre so quite a few people moved there because it was cheaper to live there because the taxes are a bit lower than in Britain. My father was in management so if he knew how much I was involved in the union now he'd be rolling in his grave. My mother stayed at home for a while but then dad said she was getting so boring that she had to go back to work, so she ran her own taxi business; she had about six cars. My mother's parents were quite religious; they were Methodists. When I was growing up I was a Sunday school teacher and I was involved in a youth group that used to go around giving lessons on Sunday. I was really involved in the church. I used to read lessons in the church so I'm used to projecting my voice. I went to an all-girls school from the age of 10 to 17. In Britain you go to one school until you're... am I talking too much?

Q: No.

AH: Okay, in Britain you go to one school until you're about 10 and then you go to another school, just the two schools. I didn't want to go to this public school because when I was growing up we used to fight the girls and boys from the private school because we used to think they were snobs, and I was a bit of a tomboy. But my sister wanted to go there, who was four years older than me, so then I had to go there. You had to take an entrance exam. My English wasn't very good so my grandfather, who was a headmaster, actually took me out of primary school and coached me three weeks so I passed the exam. I don't know how he did that, although he was the headmaster of that school at one stage, but he was retired. Anyway, I went there, I got a scholarship there, and then I went to teacher's training college in North Wales. In those days you went to a college to train to be a teacher and you got a three-year teacher's training certificate. If you wanted a degree they stayed on for a year afterwards.

So I took that in Bangor, North Wales, and then I went back to the Isle of Man but I couldn't get a job there. My mother was a Manx, she grew up on the Isle of Man. My father actually was born in Canada, in Saskatchewan. His parents were Irish and they moved to Saskatchewan and had a horse ranch when there was some kind of depression in Ireland. I don't know the dates. So he was only there for about six years and his family went back to the Isle of Man. So I couldn't get a job. I went for an interview at the Isle of Man. At that time I wanted to be in the Isle of Man. I couldn't get a job so one of my friends said, why don't we be nannies and we can go to Canada. So the two of us arranged this but just before we were going to go the other person got a job, so they didn't go. Then about a week before I was going to go I was offered a job by the Board of Education in the Isle of Man, no that's not true. After I'd left I was offered a job and my father opened the letter and he was so mad. He wrote them a letter saying, you know, the government paid for this person's education and you didn't give her a job and now she's left the country; I hope you're happy. But I came over here as a nanny for a couple of years. First job I had was with a man with two boys, and it was in the Norwood area, which is nothing wrong with that but this house was, he was a slum landlord. He said to me one night, you know, if ever you feel horny I'm available. I actually said, I find you completely repulsive and I wouldn't touch you with a barge pole. But anyway, that job, as a nanny you join an agency.

CO: Was it the Redding Agency?

AH : I can't remember what it was now; the White Agency I think. So I was there for six weeks then I moved on to a Jewish household in Glenora. I was there for a few months. The father didn't talk to me; he ignored me. The mother: It's the first time I'd ever met someone who was a real stay-at-home sort of jet set person. She got dressed to go for meals and theatre and everything like that. The child was only a little girl and every time I went out she cried because I spent more time with her. Then I was with another house, this time Ukrainian, and she was a lovely cook, in Sherwood Park. That didn't last too long either; she was having problems with her husband. Then I got a job with a decent family and I stayed there for about a year or so, but by that time I was a bit embittered with all the other jobs so I wouldn't do anything extra.

Anyway, then I decided to go back home and I went back to the Isle of Man for about a year and did different jobs. I wouldn't let my father help me get a job, so I worked in a cheese factory. The money was good but the people in the factory were pretty rough and my father didn't like me working there. In the end I decided to come back to Canada. I did odd jobs and then I decided I should decide what I'm going to do. So I went to Grant McEwan and took a year of childcare work of course, and I did really well at that. But then I thought, I don't think I'll be able to carry through that, because you have to help these children and you have to care so much, and it takes a lot out of you. So then I thought I'd take the library technician course at Grant McEwan, and that was a lot of work. I took my placement at the Londonderry Public Library so a job came up there and eventually I didn't get the first job but I got the second job there.

Q: How many years ago was that?

AH: Twenty.

Q: How did you come to be a nanny?

CO: I applied to the Redding - well I always wanted to travel. When I was 22, I applied to the Redding Agency in England to be a nanny, and I was assigned to a Jewish family. They had three children: Marco, Marcel and Madeleina. The little girl had been adopted and she was the most ugly child you've ever seen in your whole life. It really was; it was sad. I actually, the first two days were very strange to me and this baby fell off the change table. When you hear of all the different cases I think, my god, what if anything had happened to her? But she was fine, she was sturdy and strong, and they adopted her because they wanted a girl. Many different things went on. They went to a Catholic school, the Jewish kids, because there was no Jewish school where they were. One of the little boys got a job as Jesus in a play, and it was really like they didn't want this to happen. I made all the costumes for the kids to be in this play. They treated me kind of like crap, really.

Q: What do you mean?

CO: Well I got one day a week off and every other weekend. I got \$300 a month. I remember one time it was my weekend off and I went out with my girlfriends. I remember being paged at the club to come home because Mrs. Langston was alone and didn't want to be alone in the house. The kids used to call me Mama Caca, because my name's Cathy but they couldn't say Cathy. On my day off I had to clean all the five bathrooms and vacuum the whole house before I could go, on my day off. And I got every other weekend off.

Q: So you were expected to do all the work around the house.

CO: Everything except sleep with the husband.

Q: You were more than a nanny.

CO: I was. I did the cooking, cleaning, laundry – everything. But it made me grow.

Q: How long did you stay there?

CO: I stayed in that job and I was walking around. It was close to the university and I lived in this big house. He was in insurance. They were a Jewish family and they took me to lots of things and I learned about the Jewish faith. I was walking around the campus one day and I saw this job advertised, so I applied for the job in the library and got the job. She told me that I was going to be sent back to England because I had a binding contract with her. So they threatened me with being deported from Canada, but then I realized it was only a moral contract, it wasn't a binding contract. So stupidly I agreed that I would come back every night and make the dinner for them while I was working at McMaster University, and that's what I did.

Q: So there was a sense of indenture built in.

CO: Yes. I was very fortunate because...

Q: Did they pay your way and all that?

CO: No, I paid my own way. I had to pay the Redding Agency 300 pounds and I paid my own way, then I got \$300 a month with no healthcare or anything like that. So then I went back every night and made the dinner for them and worked at the university. Then I remember knocking on doors, and it was the middle of winter when I quit my job. Mrs. Stolberg, the Jewish lady said, you can live at this house. This lady was crazy. In this bedroom, she'd walk around naked in the middle of the night. She used to tie all my purses to the bottom so she could lock the door so she wouldn't come in. It was really bizarre. Anyway, I lived with Mrs. Stolberg for about 18 months. It was crazy.

AH: They're not all like that. The first job I had I guess I was naïve and my dad didn't want me to go into a home where there wasn't a mother, and I had to clean up after dinner and help them with their homework and stuff. But the next job I was there for six months and the father never talked to me. But I did get time off and I had use of her sports car. She really wanted me to stay. I had a little room on the main floor and she was going to give me a room in the basement and I was going to choose the wallpaper and stuff. But I remember when it was at Rosh Hashanah with the candles.

CO: Yes, Friday nights.

AH: I had to sit there and say blah-blah, blah-blah with Amy. I had to learn to say it.

CO: I was very lucky because my father made me get my landed immigrancy before I came, because if I hadn't have gotten my landed immigrancy I would've been up the creek. But fortunately my dad said, you're not going off to Canada with your landed

immigrancy, so I got that so I was a landed immigrant when I arrived. I was walking through the university campus and I got a job, so I was very lucky.

Q: Turn the camera off for a moment. . .

CO: My father was very involved in the union from when he was a very young man, because he worked in an asbestos factory where there was no vacation at that time. My mother worked in a bomb factory because it was World War II. My father had a very big problem with people talking about classes. He would get really angry when someone would say, well you middle class, and he'd say, what the hell do you mean, I'm working class. If you're working for a living you're working class. Kiss my ass, you're not middle class, you're working class. If you're working for a living you're working class. He was really big on unions. I was raised with unions. I was raised from five years old everybody sitting around the table reading a newspaper. We had to read the newspaper before we'd go to school. We constantly were involved in politics. I campaigned for Hal Wilson in Heighton when I was a kid, like I campaigned the last campaign and it broke my heart when we got so badly beaten. I'm a union person all the way; my father would die in his grave if I ever became anything else.

Q: Turn the camera off again for a minute. . .

CO: I started working for the Edmonton Public Library in October 1980. I arrived in Edmonton from Hamilton where I'd lived for nine years with my three-year-old son. So I took him to the interview for my job with me. I remember being asked by the woman that was the personnel officer what I was going to do with this child when I started work. I said to her, would you ask my husband what he was going to do with this child if he was sitting here right now? She said, no that's not the question I'm asking you – what are you going to do with your child? I said, but I want to know if you would ask my husband the same question, because why are you asking me this question? Do you think I'm going to put him out on the street? She said, well no, but you've got the job. She said, can you start tomorrow? I said, no I have to find somewhere for my child to be.

So I started work and I worked in I think it was called Circulation at that time, and they'd just computerized. The second night I was there they fired a girl for stealing from the till, and the computers went down. I had to go phone Boston central control and they would show me how to bring up the computer. I didn't know what they were talking about. They were saying boot this and boot the other and boot the other, and I had no idea. It was compulsory we had to work two hours of overtime every day because there was a boom on in Edmonton in 1980 and we had applications boxes and boxes high. Everybody had to work two hours of overtime, but with a small child that was quite difficult for me. Plus the Montessori School I put my child in charged \$5 to \$10 every 10 minutes you were late picking up your child. So it was really, really difficult. We were living in a motel, you couldn't refuse the overtime.

People were quitting all the time. There were tons of jobs at the library, people were coming in and quitting. I'd come from Ontario where people were not only getting

degrees they were getting MBAs, they were getting Masters of Library Science to work in a library. People were coming here and getting a job so easily and quitting and not coming to work, but it was left to the people that were conscientious. I remember someone saying to me, well you seem quite sociable, would you like to be the volunteer coordinator for the whole library? So then I became the social convener, after four days of working for the library, for the whole library. I worked there for a while and then I worked in Audio-visual for a while. I didn't particularly like it there. I didn't like the manager, but another manager approached me and asked me to apply for another job, and it was working with senior citizens. I absolutely loved it. I worked with the homebound, I went to the hospital and watched some of them die – I loved that job.

Q: What kind of library work were you doing with senior citizens?

CO: It was delivering books to the elderly, the homebound, people with MS, children with cerebral palsy, anyone who could not get out of the home. So I went to the nursing homes and I went to the homes and found out what their reading tastes were, and I would find a volunteer to work with them. I did that for ten years, and after many of them died I felt I couldn't do it anymore.

Q: Which building were you in?

CO: I was in the Mills Memorial Library downtown on the third floor.

Q: Tell me about the overtime. Did you complain to anyone? Was the union involved in any way?

CO: I never even thought about the overtime. They said, oh Cathy you live in the Westmount area, Mrs. so and so needs two bags of books. Would you mind dropping them off? It never even occurred to me at that time that it was overtime. I would just grab two bags of books and take them over on the bus and deliver them to the lady, and of course that would involve having a cup of tea with them. For example, a wonderful woman from Estonia who died in the Royal Alex, we sat with her while she died, because she had no family here. I never thought about it as overtime, it was my job.

Q: But you were saying about how it was compulsory to work overtime.

CO: Oh the overtime, it was. It was rough, especially when you were new to a city, new to a province, and you had a three-year-old child and you hadn't found a home yet.

Q: So the union didn't go to bat for you people?

CO: Well I never thought about it at that time, because everybody was doing it, and we just did it.

Q: What sort of work did you do when you first came to work in the library?

AH: Before I do that, you know you said we could go back. I just want to mention as a nanny I got \$600 a month. That was spending money and you didn't have to pay anything. I mean maybe it was \$600 towards the end, but you had a car and you had gas; they put gas in the car. There was a group of us and we used to party. In one area there were three of us, and someone had a hot tub so we'd just take the kids over there, throw them in a bed and jump in the hot tub during the day, and then at night it was a boom. We'd go to bars and guys would give you matchbox things with addresses on, so we'd go to all these parties. I'd get up in the morning and one job I had with these two kids, one was about four and one was about two, they learned that they couldn't talk to me in the morning. They had to be very quiet when I got up because I was hung over. I was like, "shhh", so they learned that. Anyway, it was a way to get used to living in another country. I lived with a Jewish family, Ukrainian family, a horny guy, and then a regular Canadian family. So I wanted to explain some people, so it's a good experience sorry, it's a good experience. I want to say something about my father. He was a manager of a garage so he sold cars and managed everything else.

CO: Was he a Conservative?

AH: Yes, so I grew up in a Conservative home. When Cathy was talking about social class, it's really important in Britain when you grow up like that what class you're in, and when you speak to certain people you speak to them in a nicer way – you think about how you're talking and you talk nicer. In Canada what I like is you don't have to give a shit about anything like that. You just talk how you want, and that's good. My father, if anyone came to buy a car or get his car fixed or anything and he swore, he'd tell him to leave the garage because he wasn't having that type of language. He had very strong moral beliefs and he didn't always go along with what the owner of the company wanted, and it would mean that he might not get a promotion. But I always admired him for that, and that's why I tend to be quite outspoken. I may have not got as many friends or got promotions or anything, because I believe in being honest and saying what you believe. I always respected my father for that.

CO: But thank god you didn't become a Conservative.

Q: What were some of your early impressions when you first went to work for the library?

AH: I went to work at the Londonderry Public Library in Londonderry Mall in the basement. It's still in the mall now but now it has two floors instead of one. So we didn't have any windows or anything. I did do a field placement there, I think it was for a month, and that sort of gave me an idea of what to expect. I was hired as a Library Assistant Level 3 and what you had to do was you basically did everything in those days. You did check-in, checkout, story time for the three and four and five year olds. You had to do displays, and you had to help people find things. You had to go on school visits to promote the library, and in the summer they had summer reading club. At our Londonderry library summer reading club, the children had to come to the library and read a book and then they had to come to the desk and tell you about the book and you

had to ask them some questions. If they hadn't read a book they wouldn't get a sticker. What would happen is you could have a lineup of 20 kids for hours. You get a little child of four coming up and, what was their name, and they'd say, it's a little bear. The mother and father would be like, what else was in the story, and applying a lot of pressure on them. It's more standardized now. They don't have any of that stuff. They've standardized an awful lot in the library, consistency throughout the library. That was about what I did.

Q: So overall you enjoyed your job?

AH: Yes, I enjoyed it.

Q: How long did you work there, and what was your next step in your progression in the library?

AH: I worked there for five years. But after a while I felt it was just a repeat of the same thing each year: summer reading club, displays, story time. What happens when you're dealing with the public is you get quite fond of certain patrons and they like you, so you have that interaction with them. But towards the end I got a bit tired because people were lying all the time. Someone would have fines and then this one guy... When they check out you're told you have to tell them if they have fines over \$2. So you'd check their books out and then you'd say, you know you have fines of \$2; you can pay them now or later, just letting you know. Actually you were meant to tell them anything, so if the fines are 10 cents.

This one I said and he said, what are the fines for? I said, well you've taken out all these children's books. I don't have any children. Then this little kid comes running down the stairs – daddy, daddy. I just got a bit tired because what happens is you're at the desk helping people and then you have three people come along and they're all complaining, it sort of would put me in a bad mood. I heard of somebody from the Stanley A. Milner Library downtown who wanted to transfer for a few months, and she wanted to come to Londonderry. So my manager said, is anyone interested? So I said that I would do it. So I went up to the cataloguing department of the Stanley A. Milner Library, it was supposed to be for a few months. I quite enjoyed that new challenge, and we both enjoyed it so we decided to make it permanent.

Q: Do you remember anything else about working with the public in the library?

CO: I think for me because I love people, and as I've said I've got Koreans, Japanese and all kinds of people living in my home constantly all the time, I find I get emotionally involved in their lives. I've been invited to some of my children in story hour's weddings and birthdays and all kinds of things. Now I'm downtown I can tell you horrible things about people who are dealing in drugs and treat you terribly. They would sooner knife you than cooperate with you on the desk; it's quite serious.

Q: That's a story that needs to be told.

CO: So now I'm working downtown and we have many problems at the downtown library. We have people who show, and all they have is their release papers from jail, and they want access to the internet. If you're a caring person you look at this person and think, my god what happened to you in your life that you ended up in jail, because lots are young kids, and you give them whatever. We have many kids who arrive on the Greyhound bus who've had stuff stolen. I don't know what goes on but it seems a lot of people get stuff stolen on the Greyhound bus. They get beat up. We have many women who come in who've been beaten up. We have immigrant women come in who if their husbands find out they've even mentioned anything to us about anything they will be beaten up. They want to try and find addresses for help. Sometimes you can have a day where you'll have 10 or 12 people who are really in big, big trouble – kids and women and children. It really takes its toll on you because what can you do. You can give them the names of social workers, you can give them books to help them, but in the end they're on the street and they have nothing.

Q: So the library is a place to go to.

CO: Yes. It gives them access to internet, they can get a free library card. If they're in the some of the shelters, some of the shelters we're not allowed to give cards to. We deal with many schizophrenics in the library, many many.

Q: What are some of the problems dealing with them/

CO: Well for instance, I'm trying to think of a case that actually happened today. A fellow came in today and he wanted something and I answered the question and he was back two minutes later asking me the same question. I said, well didn't I help you before? Then it clicked on me that he was not quite sane, and he wasn't, he was completely and utterly out of his game. He walked out in front of a car in front of the library today. The car didn't hit him but it almost did. We're social workers in the library, basically downtown we're social workers. We are, we're totally social workers. I was called in the office because a man came in and he wanted money for the phone. I'm kind of being gross now, but he had snot all over him, he was filthy. He had this money and he was all wet and everything and he said, give me money for the phone. I didn't want to take that money so I gave him \$35 of my own money, 35 cents sorry, for the phone. I wrote in the till IOU 35 cents and I was called in I was never ever to do that. I could've been fired.

Q: Why?

CO: Because you can't give money to beggars and I was actually stealing from the till technically. If you think about it, I was stealing from the till because I took 35 cents from the till and I wrote an IOU and I was going to put 35 cents from my wallet in the till. But I didn't want to take all this money with all the snot and everything on it. He wanted to phone his social worker because he was high and he couldn't function.

Q: What incidents do you remember, Amanda? You don't deal directly with the public now, do you?

AH: No, but I used to. I know at Londonderry when I went there there was about six women who were all a bit older than me. If a child fell over and hurt themselves they'd all run over there. They were all mothers, whereas I wouldn't run over. One time this kid fell and the nose was bleeding and I was there but a couple of mothers ran over, no a couple of library staff ran over. Then I had to do story time, and I don't know whether people sometimes get this impression of me because I don't have children that they don't know what I would do with children, well not what I would do but we had story time and I used to, I wouldn't let any of the parents in; I'd shut the doors. Because they did that then anyway. Some people would let parents in but I wouldn't. Even as a new kid I thought, just sit there and keep quiet. I had those kids trained. I did this little rhyme and they had to be quiet. I was like, when I'm reading a book, it was like a typical stereotype librarian – when I'm reading a book you have to be quiet. Then after we read a book we'd play a game, and I'd let them run around and do action things and make noise.

They really liked me, the kids. You'd be walking along the mall and some kid would come running up, I love you library lady, and grab your legs. One time I was going to Great Britain and I was at the international airport and I wasn't dressed up; you can tell I'm low maintenance anyway. Some people dress up when they're shopping but I wasn't dressed up. But I'm walking along and then I get these two kids, it's the library lady, it's the library lady. I thought, oh my god, I can't get away from these kids. But I quite liked working with the public, it was more I needed more of a challenge in my job. Now I work in the main library. We don't have to deal with the public on the fourth floor but nowadays for the last year or so we all have to wear ID things with our names on. I was in the militia for 13 years so I'm used to wearing badges and stuff; I don't care about things like that, so I always put my badge on. Some people take them off when they go on the main floor. They don't want anyone knowing they work in the library because they don't want to be bothered, whereas I've got my badge and sometimes people ask me questions on the main floor or the second floor. I try and help them even though I don't work in that area; I'll always try and help them a little bit. But I do know, I mean one of the people in my department got in the elevator the other day and a guy was peeing in the elevator. She was horrified.

CO: So would I be.

AH: Well I think most people would, but she was going on and on and it's like a ripple effect in the department. I find the downtown library, there's panhandlers outside and not a fun place to be coming out of for lunch and that. Younger people don't seem to have the concept of maybe they should move if they're in your way, so you have to walk around them. Maybe that's a bad stereotype.

CO: When I was working at Woodcroft Library one time on a Friday evening there were two little Asian children, one was three and one was four. It was ten to six and the library closes at six, and there was no adult with them. There were two other people

working with me and they said, we're going, Cathy; if you wanna stay, that's up to you. So I went and talked to these children and said, where's your mommy and daddy? They said, oh he's gone. So I said, where's he gone? Westmount Mall, which is close to the library. So I closed down all the library and said, well what is your names and blah blah blah. So I took these children, I locked up the library and took these children over to Westmount mall and we went through all the stores and finally we found the father at the other end of Westmount mall. I said, you can't leave children alone in the library. He said, well I thought you were open until 9. I said, no we're only open until 6 and you can't really leave your kids in the library. So anyway on the Monday morning I was really in big trouble because my boss said I should've called the police, I should never ever have done that. If those kids had claimed I'd done anything to them, blah blah blah. But they were tiny little kids. What do you do?

Q: Do most of the supervisors and managers you answer to worked in the library themselves?

CO: We seem to be getting a lot of management now that just seem to be appearing from Yellowhead Regional Library and they seem to be appointed managers. There doesn't seem to be many managers come through the ranks. They're just managers. Our particular boss right now is a manager, and she's quite good but she has not really got any concept of what really is going on. Also I had another incident where a young woman came in, and it was also a Friday night, and she said she was being abused by her father. She was 14. I didn't know the law at that time. I went to my boss, my boss was just leaving, and I said, I have a young woman out there and she claims she's being sexually abused by her father or step father. I said, what should I do. She said, find the information and give her the name of social services and blah blah blah. But apparently if you get someone under 15 that claims to be being abused, you're supposed to phone right away. I didn't know that, so I was in trouble for that. But you're not told those things, you're not told those things on the desk.

You're not told that if someone comes up to you with a reference question and says, we have a problem, and kids don't come out and say, we're being sexually abused. They go at it in a different way – do you have any books on molestation, do you have any books on this, do you have any help? They don't come out and say, of course not. So you don't know what you're dealing with. However, I learned from my teacher friends when I went running on the weekend with them. They said, you should've reported that right away, Cathy. Apparently you can be charged if you don't report that right away. I brought it up at a meeting with my boss, whom I love as a great boss, I brought it up at a meeting one time and she got really mad at me. She said, you shouldn't have brought that up at a meeting. But we're not told these things. We are the frontline for the inner city. We should be told about abuse, sexual abuse. We should be told about people who are, we're not told so we deal with it the best way we can, with compassion and whatever access we have to information. But we don't know, we don't know the rules of what should happen. For example, a woman was told in the children's library that if a baby continued to cry all the time she had to take the baby out of the library. So she put her running shoe in the child's mouth. They said to her, what are you doing? She goes,

you told me to shut the child up. We're not given specific instructions on how to deal with these things. We're not social workers, we're people who love books. But these things happen.

Q: What's it like working in the cataloguing department?

AH: When I started working in the cataloging department on my floor there were three areas: acquisitions, and they order the books and receive the books; then the cataloging department, and we get all the new material, the books, the DVDs, the CDs and we classify them using Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress subject headings, so we make the material accessible for the people of Edmonton.

Q: What are the challenges in that kind of work?

AH: When I was at Londonderry the manager at Londonderry got a bit annoyed if anyone made a mistake, so what happened is people wouldn't own up to things. So then we'd all get pulled in and be given a lecture. This is Mrs. Chris Vidland; she was very old school. So when I went to cataloguing I thought, oh I'm finally accountable for what I do. I'm working on something that they don't know I did it but I can tell them I did it. So I enjoyed the challenge. This is a really petty thing but at Londonderry you didn't have your own desk or anything so you had to share. I like to be organized so I'd have a desk and all my pens and everything there, and then I'd come back and I'd have to do my little off desk job that I had to do, and then all my pens are gone and everything was off the desk. So I loved having my own desk. At that time with the manager we had then it was a big more flexible. I still get an EDO so I get every second Friday off.

Q: Later I'll ask about the compressed work week.

AH: Yes but what I noticed though is in this department too if anyone made a mistake they got into trouble. You had to be very quiet and you couldn't talk. You all had your own desk. Let's say if I went to talk to somebody over there, one of the managers would come over and she'd say, is there a problem? It was very strict.

Q: What's the reason for that?

AH: Because you have to get on with your work. You're not there to talk, and if you're talking you might be making more mistakes. But also what happened when I got up there was we got a new director, Penny McKeen, and I believe the union didn't like her terribly much. I liked her. She came to the library, that's distracting me. . . We got a new director of the library I mentioned, Penny McKeen. As I said, the union didn't like her very much. I wasn't involved in the union so I'm not really sure why, but anyway she started in the library and within a few months she organized afternoon teas. She wanted everyone from all the branches and everybody to come to the main library on the third floor, time off from work, to meet her. Once she met someone she remembered your name, which is sometimes a big scary. She's only met you once and you'd see her in the hall and she'd be like, oh hi Amanda, how are you doing?

She was the one that came up with the corporate values; it was really a big thing. The whole library staff had to go to these meetings and come up with corporate values and work on the corporate values, which we still have today which is still the same; they're finally starting to look at them. Then they had representatives from each department would meet, I'm not sure if they met with her but they would meet and bring forward any problems. We would talk about them in staff meetings and there was also a suggestion box which was anonymous, and all these things would be discussed. But then that stopped. But in our department I guess the managers were told everyone had to follow through on these corporate values, so they sort of changed a bit. I was starting work there at that time. A few people said it was because I was there, but it wasn't. We'd go to a meeting and. . .

CO: Don't sell yourself short. You did change a lot, Amanda.

AH: I'd go to a staff meeting and I'd be like, well blah blah blah. I noticed people weren't saying much and then a few people said to me, you shouldn't say what you think because you're going to get into trouble.

Q: Explain that.

AH: If they criticized or said something, management would tell them off. They had people crying and stuff. They didn't feel they could say what they wanted, whereas I didn't come from that environment. So it got better, people started to say what they thought.

Q: Are you saying that that exercise in corporate values ended up being an exercise in discipline where people had to toe the line?

AH: No, I'm saying it got better because managers had to try and follow these corporate values. They had to be a bit more open. Staff weren't allowed to drink at their desks. I'm not talking about alcohol, I mean they weren't allowed any water or coffee or anything; they weren't allowed any food at their desks because you might spill that on a book. But they relaxed about that.

Q: Where did we leave off when you first went to work for the library?

CO: I worked downtown and then I went to Woodcroft and then I went back downtown.

Q: Take us through that progression.

CO: Okay. So I worked first of all in customer service and that was dealing with applications and fines and membership and all that kind of stuff. Then I worked for the audiovisual department and that was kind of trying, and then I worked in the library access division which I absolutely loved but it was draining on me because you'd be seeing deceased, deceased, deceased. You were dealing with people who were ill with

MS and all kinds of problems. Then I decided I needed a change so I went to the Woodcroft branch library and I worked at Woodcroft branch library for nine years. I really loved it there but then I lost my only child in a terrible car accident. The patrons, my freezer was full of food and every time the patrons would come in they'd start talking and they'd all start crying so I thought, I have to get away from here and be anonymous.

So I went back downtown, and I couldn't believe the change in the downtown library. I couldn't believe what you have to deal with downtown in many ways. You're dealing with very ill people. You're dealing with the street people, number one, you're dealing with schizophrenics because they've closed down a lot of the clinics, you're dealing with HIV people. You're dealing with people who are just lonely. You're dealing with new immigrants who have different rules in their countries. It's very draining on a person if you're a caring person. There are people in our department where Judith and I work and they don't really care. They just say, this is the rules - go away. But if you're a caring person and you really do care about your job, and give them a book to read or some information to help them through their lives, it can really take a lot out of you.

Q: You must see a lot of single mothers.

CO: Single mothers, the children, I don't know what possesses some of the parents in some instances. This woman with the shoe in the child's mouth, a lot of people come in and they've got three and four kids. Kids cry all the time, they're in the library from 9 until 6 at night just wandering around. It's awful, it's awful.

AH: It's sad that some of the staff don't care. But I believe that maybe they did care to begin with but because of the management style and everything they've been there a long time and it's like whatever. So there are people who do really care but some people have just become more bitter about it. I don't want to say some of those people didn't care to begin with, that's all I wanted to add.

CO: There's a Thomas Strefaniuk. Do you know Thomas Strefaniuk? He's a writer in Edmonton and he wrote *Miles is No Longer* at the Library, because we don't have any collections anymore, it takes jobs away from people.

AH: It's a poem. We should give it to you.

Q: Can you describe the poem?

CO: Miles Davis, he said Miles is no longer at the Edmonton Public Library. At one point Judith would order all the books on tape, she would know her customers and what they wanted. She would say, oh so-and-so would love this, and she would go ahead. Now Judith no longer has a job. The person who ordered jazz, the people who order classical music, people who ordered rock, they no longer have a job. They said it cost too much money and now they just bring in a broad spectrum of what the general people would like. So Thomas Stefaniuk wrote and said Miles Davis no longer lives at the Edmonton Public Library. We had the best collection in Canada of jazz, folk music,

stuff that people wouldn't really know about unless you were a, I don't know what the word is. So it's all been made this bland kind of thing.

AH: They have central selection people now, so the people who used to work in the audiovisual section in Milner, they used to each have a little area and they could order material, and they all really enjoyed it.

CO: And they were specialists.

AH: Yes. But then they decided they're going to have librarians; and they're in my department, the selection librarians. They order from catalogues and stuff. Collections used to belong to certain libraries but now we're going towards floating collections, which means each branch if you buy five copies of a book and the first five copies will go to certain branches but if they buy more books then they'll go to other libraries, same with the DVDs. But what happens with that, if you take a DVD out of the main library then you can drop it off at another library near where you live, say at Highlands, and then it belongs to the Highlands library. What happened with the children's books is each branch was putting little labels on the spines, fairy tales and all these labels. My manager, actually her term is director, she brought a bunch of these books in and she had a fit that they were all doing different things. They're meant to be a floating collection, and more and more now floating

CO: I give cards to people who've just arrived on the Greyhound bus and in two incidents I was told that they were told on the Greyhound that the best place to score a drug deal is the basement washroom in the downtown library. It's well known in all the drug deals that that's the place to score drugs. What else were we talking about?

Q: Why does so much of the public congregate around the library?

CO: The public library is accessible to everybody. Access to information is a law that has been made, so every person is eligible to access to information. So if you don't walk through the door drunk or you don't appear drunk, you're allowed in the library. Everybody that comes into the library is allowed access to a computer, to the internet for one hour of computer for free, and all the books and magazines and anything they want. So it's a great deal. There's all kinds of things going on. For example, in the winter we have church groups that bring sandwiches for the homeless, they bring jackets to people, which is great. However, there's a lot of people that's on drugs that aren't on medication at the time that are at the library. There's people that arrive from shelters, they come right from the shelter to the library. There's people who arrive from the prisons, as I said, with their parole papers on Monday morning; they've all got their parole papers, they're on parole. Many people in the library and the security guards will say there's 19 or 36 warrants out for arrest for this guy. We have to deal with these people and we're not trained to deal with them. We're not trained.

Q: Is it because the library is the only place that might be open?

CO: It's the only place that's open after 8 o'clock. The malls and stuff are closing at 8 o'clock; all the malls close at 8. The library remains open until 9, so once they're all thrown out of the malls they come to the library. The ones that are totally incapacitated wait outside the library. They ask you for money, they wait there for the people leaving. People are terrified. On Friday nights we have an organization where we all make sure someone's got a ride home or we take a cab home. We've actually seen someone stabbed to death on the front of our desk on a Friday night. He didn't die but they were taking out the paddles of life on him.

Q: Has management addressed this?

CO: The management did actually come down that night because the television crews and everybody was there, and management did offer us a ride home that night.

Q: But are they addressing the general health and safety aspect of it?

CO: They're not addressing it at all I don't think, because they're not aware of it because they're not there.

AH: I want to say that there's been a change in the security at the library. They used to have some security guards, and I don't want to appear racist when I say this, but I'm not sure what country some of them were from and some of them couldn't speak English. One particular guy at a certain time in the day he had to go and pray in the corner of the library and stuff like that. Then they had hired a different company who seemed a bit better and then they said they have to have a security guard on the front foyer all the time now. They even gave him a desk recently. I sometimes think that person is more like an information person but also another change is the special constables; they wear those gray uniforms.

They're not quite police. I don't know whether they carry some kind of truncheon or whatever you call those sticks, but they patrol the whole downtown. Quite often you come into the library and there's two security guards and there's the people in the gray uniforms and there's a policeman there too. You don't know what it's about. I've heard that people are moved by these special constables and security guards from the mall. Security guards hired by the mall, they move people out of the mall and then they come to the library or they go to City Hall and they're moved out of there. In the winter you find a lot of people come to the library to sleep. I think the security guards are told they have to wake them up, but they come to have a sleep in the library. I've heard about the drugs too although I've never experienced anything. We have had those police dogs in doing the sniff thing but we didn't hear much about that. But what happened, there was an article, I'm not sure if it was in the Sun, about the library of fear.

CO: Oh that was in the Metro.

AH: The library of fear, and that was the Edmonton Public Library, and how there's drugs and blah blah blah. Basically someone who works in the library or somewhere

mentioned some things and then a couple of days later we all got a gag order sent to us by email saying that we're not allowed to discuss anything, and if anyone else has any questions we've got to direct them to the communications manager.

CO: We weren't allowed to talk to anybody. . . . One Sunday afternoon there was somebody stabbed in the library and then there was a young girl who was 14 who apparently was raped in one of the bathrooms. This is terrible. So we were told we weren't to say anything about it, but myself and another woman talked to CBC and said, this is what's happening.

AH: I don't want to sound like a goodie two-shoes, because a lot of the library management things bother me. But the library does offer courses. They have offered a course dealing with people with mental illness, which staff can sign up for, and things about people with HIV and dealing with seniors and stuff. So some of that may help, but I do agree with what Cathy has said.

Q: Have any library jobs been contracted out?

AH: The cleaners used to be City workers, didn't they Cathy?

CO: Yes.

AH: Then they started contracting out. I used to work a bit later in my department and sometimes I was the last there. I always believe you should be pleasant to everybody, so I'd always say hello to the cleaners, although then some of them started to ask me for help with their work, because they were learning English as a second language. But they'd always come and chat to me at my desk and stuff because I was pleasant. So I notice a difference with that – they don't seem to be doing such a good job. I'm not saying those particular people, but since then. I've said I would do it, give me \$10 an hour and I'd earn some extra money and do a better job than the cleaners.

Q: Was the security contracted out too?

AH: Yes it is, it's always been contracted out.

Q: What are some of the problems that you see with that?

AH: I believe that we should have security who are part of the union and who are paid better. Right now we've got staff that have been there for quite a while but some of them are applying for jobs in other places. There used to be an awful turnover. What happens when you come to the library in the morning? The library opens at 9, so all the staff have to go to the basement and there's a security guard sitting there. Well for a while there, there was a new person all the time and they were letting us all go up to the elevator and never asked who we were just because we looked like we knew where we were going.

CO: You're going to be sorry you asked me about contracting out, because I think it's despicable, totally and utterly despicable, especially with the cleaning staff.

Q: Because?

CO: Because we are paying these people minimum wage, we're abusing them because they're from other countries. We're sitting behind a desk, they're cleaning, they're being abused by everybody because they're still dealing with the same riff-raff that we're dealing with downtown. When we had people that worked as cleaning staff and we had one staff member who is a true example of this, she was a City employee so she could take courses. She is now a level III employee. These people, we pick up the cheapest contract we can, the contracting out. We have sometimes five people, sometimes a 14-year-old will come with the family to clean five floors of the library in three hours at minimum wage. It's absolutely disgusting. I told Mayor Mandel and I told Ben Henderson and Louis Cardinal when I was campaigning for all of them. Contracting out is despicable. We live in a country that's the richest province in one of the richest countries in Canada. Contracting out, what the hell are we doing? We're treating immigrants like crap, we really are. Where are the unions for them? Where are the unions for these people? We are sitting behind our desks being paid \$30 an hour watching somebody who's cleaning pee on the floor, shit on the floor, stuff in the bathrooms, drugs all over the floor, needles in the book drops, and we're paying them minimum wage. I think it's despicable. I think contracting out is despicable not only because they go for the cheapest bidder but also many of these new immigrants where we claim to be an open country in a rich province in a rich country is very accommodating to these people. Many times this is their second job and they're afraid of being deported or whatever. We are treating new immigrants, because they're most of the people doing these jobs, appallingly.

AH: I just want to say I'm always saying hello to the cleaning staff, I'm pleasant to them. I don't treat them appallingly.

CO: But that doesn't pay the rent, Amanda, I'm sorry.

AH: I know but I'm just saying I do say hello to them and stuff. But I know it's not right. There's a lot of rules in our department. We have the Dewey Decimal System, we have the ALC subject tabbings, we have mark coding. What happens is you're trained to a really high extent. To begin with when I first worked there every time you worked on something you had a little form called an IP form and you put the details of the book and the call number or the DVD. The librarians used to check the record that you had done, and if there were mistakes they'd bring them back. Depending on who the librarian was, sometimes they'd just get put on your desk but sometimes they'd sort of give you a bit of a lecture. So we were told we had to do everything to the highest standard because people respect EPL, they respect our cataloguing standards, blah blah blah. But what happens is you're focusing so much detail in things that you can't get the material out fast enough. So contracting out the work has been an issue in department for quite a while. What happened with one manager who was there for quite a long time, her name

was Sherry Ahmed, she had to do some studies and some cost evaluations to show that it wasn't cost effective to contract out.

Q: Your work?

AH: Yes, and the processing work. In my department it used to be acquisitions, cataloguing processes but then they put us all together into one department. So one manager, Sherry Ahmed, left and then we had the manager who had been the manager of just acquisitions, Mary Flannigan; she was the manager for a while. Then we got a new manager and the library had come up with this new process that the staff are involved in the management selection, not to a big degree. But we would get to meet the candidates, the ones that they had narrowed down, then we would tell who we thought we would like to work with. So we had two people and we chose the guy, not because he was a man but because he just seemed to be more interested in cataloging stuff. We didn't get him because the director wasn't willing to pay for him to move from Ontario. What Cathy was talking about before is the other person had worked at Yellowhead and our director wanted her.

CO: Nepotism.

AH: When the manager left, Mary Flannigan, well first of all she said to me, I'm sorry Amanda I have to leave you with all these librarians. Then she said, you know, there's going to be a lot of work contracted out now because of the manager you've got. She told me that; I mean she shouldn't have told me that.

Q: So has contracting out increased?

AH: Well we didn't have any contracting out up to that point. But since Louise Follick got in we buy a lot of it's now called world language material – Hindu, Japanese, everything – and the books come and they already have a record attached and they've already got little barcodes and stuff. So the cataloguers don't have to touch them. When before when we were cataloging we had to go out on the worldwide web and look for suitable records for the DVDs and everything, now a lot of the books and DVDs and everything we buy come with a record which the library has paid for.

Q: And that would've been otherwise your work?

AH: Yes. And what I find lately is that we're keeping really current with our work. One person is off on long-term leave now, a cataloguer, because of a reason, and they don't miss her. We had a cataloguing meeting and I actually said, I guess Marilyn's off and we don't even miss her, do we? The manager looked a bit uncomfortable but I said, we don't miss that extra person. We're not suffering because we lost one cataloguer, we don't miss her.

Q: And the point of that is?

AH: The point I feel now is we're really quite caught up. My manager, we have cataloguers meetings and the cataloguers were trained to be very thorough. But now we've been told we have to accept whatever's coming in, we have to accept whatever's coming in. Then you get stuff out, you get the stuff out faster. But we don't have a lot of work in and I'm looking and I'm thinking, you don't need all of us anymore. One person's off sick, she doesn't need to be replaced. And Louise wants us to find improvements all the time to work even faster. I think there's going to be more staff asked to go and work somewhere else.

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

CO: I was working at the downtown library and nobody wanted to be the union rep so they nominated me, so I became the union rep for the downtown library. I went to a lot of the meetings but I have really bad bronchitis and I'm really allergic to smoke, so I protested about the smoke. At that time it was a very militant union. I think it was Sonia and Shelley and a lot of people that were smokers, and I was threatened actually to shut my mouth. So I got really upset and I was really put off unions for a long time. So I quit. . . .

I think having your say is what a union is about, and I think my say of not having smoking in the union meeting was a viable point for me. I also found at that time in the union there was a lot of people I felt that were complaining a lot about their jobs but were quite lazy. So I was kind of disgusted because I'd been raised with a background of my father who worked very hard and the union was like Jesus Christ quite frankly, I mean the union was a very important thing in your life. Union people were strong people who worked hard and made things better for us. But my first encounter with the union at EPL was there was a lot of people who were complaining but did not want to put the work out. So I resigned. Later on I got to know that those people were just a certain segment of the union and that many good things could be done, so I got involved again.

AH: You won't use this reason, but I'm going to tell you why I got involved in the union. It's because I moved to cataloguing and I felt that the other shop steward wasn't doing a good job. I started going to union meetings with her; we were sort of pals, so I thought I'd go to a few union meetings. But I noticed she never seemed to be passing any information on. So then I thought I might run as shop steward against her, so I became the shop steward of my department. I don't know whether it's my personality, but within a short while I was on the negotiation committee. I've probably been on nearly every committee except a couple. Do you want me to list them?

Q: Please do.

AH: I was on the education committee for two terms, the discipline committee for a couple of terms. Constitution and bylaws for quite a few terms and a term is two years, because I really enjoyed being on the constitution bylaws. I was recording secretary on the executive board for two terms, I was a trustee for one term on the executive board. I was on the hiring and contract review committee. I was probably on more but I can't

remember. I was also one of the first senior shop stewards, something that Sonia Wuschenny instigated, having senior shop stewards. Once I got involved, when I get involved with something I tend to get involved quite heavily. I just found the work interesting – it was challenging, it was something different to do. But at that time it wasn't really terribly militant. We still had the TELUS workers with us and we used to meet in the basement of the library.

Q: Tell me about your job as a shop steward.

AH: I was a shop steward in my department and people knew that they could come to me. We have a library representative who's the bargaining rep and one in particular, Joan Paton, who I'm quite friends with, she always said you should always try and work things out with your manager before you go to the union, don't just be going to the union all the time. But in my department because of the way people had been treated where you're not meant to talk and all this stuff, they felt it better to come to me and then I could just bring up a general statement. What I noticed is sometimes the manager and the assistant manager would tell somebody something but that was against what was in the collective agreement – sick leave or bereavement leave, that type of thing. So they'd come to me so then I'd go to the manager and talk to them and sort it out. But I did like the manager at that time. Since she left I realized I was one of her favourites. I didn't really realize that at the time but I felt really comfortable and I'd tell her exactly what I thought. I was open, I felt that I could be open with her.

Q: What was a senior shop steward?

AH: To begin with we had a chief shop steward and an assistant chief shop steward. But I guess there was a decision made that the assistant chief shop steward wasn't doing very much and that we should have some kind of senior shop steward system in place. So the library sort of split into three: they had a senior shop steward for the central division, the north division and the south division. We actually had to attend labour management meetings, all the three senior shop stewards, with the library rep. As a senior shop steward I was responsible for compiling and editing the current shop steward manual, which has been updated now recently. I also arranged for somebody to do some shop steward training for new shop stewards. It was from someone who was outside of our union; he came to the union meeting. I took quite an active role because there was only me downtown and I was friends with Joan Paton, who was the library rep. I kept HR informed about shop stewards and I used every time that we used to get a sheet of new employees and employees that had left and name changes, and I was in charge of updating the email system; we have a union email thing at the library. Now I believe the senior shop steward system doesn't work terribly well. What most of them are are supporters of the chief shop steward. I'm just letting you know that. They're paid extra. Our union is different because everyone gets paid – the shop stewards get paid, you get paid when you're on a committee, you get paid when you go to a meeting. People in the union sometimes suffer some kind of financial misfortune and they want to have some help. The people who go out to interview them get paid \$50 for interviewing them and if they have to go out again they get another \$50.

CO: I was shop steward for two years. I got so involved with my son and many things going on in my life and I got a little bit disheartened with the union quite frankly and I decided to resign. I always supported union but I didn't want to be involved anymore as a shop steward. Then I got involved quite a bit recently when Amanda was accused of doing something that I knew she didn't do, so I became really involved. I really believe in the union, however my heart sinks when I see these contracting out and people not being allowed to be involved in unions. I wonder where we are and how we can get them involved. I just don't like injustice of any kind and there's a lot of injustice going on right now, total injustice. I would really like to be involved as a retiree and I would give a lot more time to the union to be involved with justice. But quite frankly I don't know how to go about that right now.

Q: What are some events or incidents that you remember?

CO: One incident where I knew a woman had been fired because she'd lost some time, I knew that she was going through tragic circumstances in her life. I remember her phoning me and saying, I know I was let go because of all these things, but I really need a job and I'd like to come back to EPL. I remember going to management and saying to management, you know, you might not be aware that these things were going on in her life at that time and that's why she lost a lot of time and she was late. Many things happened in her life, however she is a really great person and I would like to guarantee that she would be a great employee if I recommend her to you. They rehired her and she's still there and is a great employee. . . . I really feel that because I was a union rep at that time and because I was probably a good employee that this woman got another chance, and she's still with the EPL library and doing really well.

AH: CSU 52 is an independent union and we have a fulltime legal council and four business agents. So the shop stewards actually don't deal with any grievances. A lot of members will deal with the business agents directly. So when you're asking us for examples, my department, well I was just very approachable. Everyone in the Milner library knows I'm a union person, so different people in the library when I'm walking around will ask me questions. So I feel that I help because I try and be positive about the union. One thing is the assistant manager used to say people couldn't work more than eight hours a day. Then I said, show me where it says that in the collective agreement; it says you can work up to 10 hours a day. So people were allowed to make up more time each day. That's reverted back since we got a control freak of a manager. But I felt good at the time that I helped with that.

CO: I would like to say something positive about Amanda. Amanda was actually absolutely criticized so badly by certain elements of the union that she was heartbroken. But she never ever gave up on the union. I think that is incredible, that she still wants to be part of the union when she was treated so badly by them, and I think she's not giving herself enough credit. I think that she was broken-hearted and she came back and she still supports the union, and I think that's the kind of people we need in unions. If she does that she can do that for everybody else.

AH: Without unions people wouldn't be having vacation, they wouldn't be having paid medical appointment time. I mean we are encouraged not to take appointments on work time, but sometimes you can't help it. I think people don't realize that people in our past have fought for all these things. They take everything for granted: statutory holidays, maternity leave. . .

Q: Do you have some favourite aspects of your contract?

CO: I thank god for maternity leave, I thank the union for bereavement leave.

Q: What do those articles provide for?

CO: For example, when I had my child I only got 12 weeks of maternity leave, and now women have 12 months of maternity leave. When my parents died in England there was four days, now there's two weeks if you have to travel for bereavement leave. Also we have vacation.

Q: What sort of vacation does your contract give you?

CO: I have six weeks vacation because I've worked there 20 years. Without the union we'd be totally at the control of the management.

Q: Are there some concrete things you can point to that people should know about?

AH: I think what's very important is the fringe benefits, just the things like all sorts of leaves people can have: bereavement leave, maternity leave, leave without pay or leave with pay for certain reasons. There's union leave – you can have time off and the union will pay but you can go to conferences and do different things. And being able to go to a medical appointment on work time and be paid, because there are still unions where you don't get paid.

Q: What's particularly strong in the CSU 52 contract?

CO: I think maternity leave is very important, totally important. I think compassionate leave, you now get one week of compassionate leave to take care of a parent with cancer or a child with cancer. I also think the fact that you can have flexible hours to work around children.

Q: How does that work?

CO: Well in some departments you can work an extra hour a week and get three days off every month and in other departments I think they can work two hours a week extra and get time off to do many things that may be important in your life. I think unions have fought for more medical coverage. I just totally think we would be nothing without a union, even though I get frustrated with them many times.

AH: I just want to say that I find it hard to think of something in particular, because I've just been on the negotiating committee and I had a job with somebody from HR on the committee going through the collective agreement and trying to make it more readable. So right now all in my head is the numbering and how everything looks and things. But I'd like to get back to you on that and think about it some more.

CO: I have a question. Do we have paternal leave as well as maternal leave?

AH: No we don't, oh yes I meant we don't have father's leave, we were going to try and get that. When a baby's born. . .

CO: We do? That's good then.

Q: What's it like being on a bargaining committee? What's the negotiating process like?

AH: Well I was on the negotiating committee quite a few years ago when I just got involved in the union, so I didn't really have any expectations. But it was traditional bargaining and the union had a fulltime legal council, Mianari, who was the chief negotiator. We were more or less, she did most of the talking but she would refer to one of us if she wanted an example. The first time I did it the management team consisted of managers from the library but also members of the board of trustees of the library. I actually found the whole thing rather frustrating because the union side was very well prepared and the management, one time one of the trustees couldn't come so the next time they'd have to spend time catching up with everything. So we had a lot of caucuses where we weren't doing anything, because we were prepared. The caucus was for them. So I said to Mianari I would never do that again; I felt it was a waste of my time. But I got elected recently to the negotiation committee and it was mutual interest based negotiating. I thought that was really good. With the library, do you want us to tell you how we get the information?

Q: Go ahead.

AH: Okay. We send out, we compiled a questionnaire and it was sent out to all the members of the library. This year was the first year that we could use the email system, so we did online interviews. But we also told people that they could have a hard copy if they wanted, if they weren't using the computer. So we compiled the interviews and because we used an online system called Survey Monkey it was so much easier because they compiled all the subjects together. Then we had to decide what we felt were points of interest that we had to bring forward for discussion, because it's interest based. If I had a problem I wasn't going to bring that problem up, it was interest based. It had to be if people were having problems in a certain area. So when we went forward and because we're a small library like 450 staff we know the managers well.

There was a chief negotiator for the City. We didn't know him but we got to know him and he loosened up after a while. I felt that it was quite good but I'm somebody who I

sort of joke around quite a bit but I also say exactly what I think. So I think in that situation I provided quite a bit of relief, comic relief. But it was a long process and we had to do a lot of work on our own time and it sort of wore me out a bit. But that's because I felt that I believe in being prepared, so I'd read through everything. What management did was we have a new manager in HR and she went through the library collective agreement. Every area where she thought there was a problem or she couldn't understand something, she wanted to change it. So they came forward with 75 proposals, and we had like 16 or something. We did have a lot of housekeeping because I had gone through and found all these inconsistencies. But what it meant was we had to be knowledgeable about 75 proposals. The first meeting we had where we discussed them, we have a new legal council now, Tamara Chivers. Her father is Barry Chivers, who's quite a well-known legal labour lawyer in the city. We were exchanging proposals but ours were like a little paragraph to explain everything. But there's weren't, so we didn't know what some of them were about. One of them in particular mentioned that they had to bring an example of illness. So I said to Wally, who's the chief negotiator of the City, I said, would that be in the form of liquid? I was actually really, when I saw their proposals I was shocked at all of them. We left the room and there was Judith Basisty, who was the library rep who has to be on the committee, Patty Reid, who works in the children's department of the main library, who was elected, and myself. We did have another person that was elected but he got a job somewhere else so we decided to just go with the three people. But after they left this is what I actually was like. I was like, holy shit, holy shit, holy shit. I just couldn't stop myself. I said, look at all these proposals. Judith and Patty were like, oh they have some of the same proposals as us; we have some things in common. I was like, holy shit, holy shit, there's 75 proposals. Tamara was a bit shocked and she said, I can't do this, this is ridiculous, they're not doing interest based. But what they did is they ended up combining some of them.

CO: Why do you think they did that?

AH: Well they did that, the HR manager had gone through and every time there's a problem or she didn't understand something she made a list. So we went away and looked at their 75 proposals, well this is what I did, and tried to get information and stuff and made a chart about the numbers and all this stuff. Then they came back the next day and they'd renumbered everything and compiled it all, and I was really mad. I said, I spent all this time getting prepared and now they've done this. Tamara said, well they can do that you know, union rules. But I found it was a good experience and everyone was pretty positive. Even sometimes our chief negotiator and the HR manager had differences of opinions but they left it there in the room and then they were talking about cupcakes. There was a lot of talk about food in that meeting. One of the directors, Joanne Griner, she said to Judith Basisty one day when they met in the library that it was the best negotiating session she'd ever been involved in.

Q: What happened in 1990 around the time Shirley Wood was elected president of CSU 52?

CO: I'd resigned, and I was absolutely astonished that she became union president for the library?

Q: Why do you say that?

CO: Because I don't believe Shirley was the right person for the union. I don't believe that she had the knowledge, I don't believe she had the education to represent the union. I didn't have any respect for her, quite frankly.

Q: Do you have any recollection of what was going on during that time?

AH: I wasn't involved in the union at that time but I know it was a big thing to get Shirley Wood nominated. We were all told to come out as library staff and vote for her.

Q: So did you?

AH: Yes I did.

Q: What happened after that?

AH: As I said, I wasn't really involved at that time. I know that she didn't last out her position but I'm not sure why.

CO: I'm not sure why either.

Q: There was a lot of infighting in the union.

CO: There was. It was a really bad union at that point.

Q: What sort of union is CSU 52?

CO: Right now I think it's a really good union. I think we have good representation, we have knowledgeable representation. For the times that we're living in I think we have a very good relationship with the union. I think they're doing the best they can with the management that we have. I think it's a time of fear because of the economy and I think that the union and management are excellent right now.

Q: What problems did they have previously?

CO: I think the problems of the union that I didn't want to be involved with were many people who wanted to complain a lot and didn't want to work and were very negative and didn't want to see any kind of management side. We don't always want to see the management side but sometimes you have to see their side, because there are always two sides. But I think you need people with knowledge and education to run the union, and I don't think I saw it at that time.

Q: What is the character of your union?

AH: The word that comes to mind is incestuous, but maybe that's not the right word. We're an independent union and I think because we're independent we have more money because we don't have to give money to nationals and stuff. You must have been told about our split with CUPE and all that. That was before my time too, but we split with CUPE for some reason. So I feel that we have quite a bit of money. In the past I feel that our union focuses on CSU 52. Our union was involved in creating the coalition of unions, which I believe is a really good thing. The Coalition of Edmonton Civic Unions involves the firefighters, CUPE Local 30, ATU the Alberta Transit Union, and we have the UFCW, the Shaw workers. It gives us more power because if one particular union is dealing with the City, the city manager knows that we will all support each other. So instead of the city management just dealing with CSU 52, which has about 4,000 employees, they know that our union has the support of ATU and the firefighters. Also now, because of us, Calgary are looking at forming their own coalition. The negotiation committees from all those different unions, we had a meeting and we talked about strategies and who's going to be the head union, the first one that's going to be discussing money and everything. So I think that's a really good thing. I just found though that with CSU 52 I didn't always feel part of a brotherhood or sisterhood of the union movement. I personally took part in quite a few rallies and when TELUS were on strike. We lost TELUS, they used to be Ed Tel and they belonged to our union. When they were on strike they had a rally every Thursday and I went and I had the CSU 52 flag and I took part in the Shaw Conference Centre strike just walking the picket lines. I even went down to Brooks although I didn't know where the hell Brooks was and I didn't know the bus ride was going to be about five hours each way. But I like to believe in more of a global union, but that seems to be not encouraged. Whenever I've been to rallies some people may come out but there's not very many. Most of the other unions don't seem to have even heard of CSU 52.

Q: So you've lost something by being an "independent" union.

AH: Well what I feel we've lost is the resources for training. I've taken part in the Edmonton District Labour Council; they have an annual school. I'm not sure if they still do it, but for about four years I went and the union paid. But I thought, why should I be going outside of my union for this training? A few of us – Judith Basisty and Therese Gavagan and myself – were all on the executive and were invited to take part in an AUPE conference for shop stewards and members at Jasper Park Lodge. That was so informative and everyone seemed so much closer. So I'm not sure what term I can use. I really value the office staff of the union and the president and the business agents and financial administrator and the legal person. They don't have to deal with the bullshit that we deal with. I just find it hard when you want to help people that there's so much politics involved.

Q: What do you think of Marion Leskiw? How has he been able to be the president for 18 years?

AH: I think Marion is very intelligent and I think the main attribute to him is that he has really good relations over the years. He's well respected by the other union presidents in the coalition so he's always been able to speak to the city manager about certain things to try and solve issues before they became too big. He's also a very fair man. I probably would prefer someone who was a bit more militant, because in some areas I've seen him he let s people say whatever; at meetings and stuff he wants everyone to have their turn. But he's political too. That's what you notice about the executive – they're all political. They all want to keep their positions so they may not say certain things. But that's part of life, everyone's political.

CO: I think he's a just man. I'm not really involved as much as I used to be but I think from what I've observed of him I think he's an honest and just man and I think he does the best that he knows how. I don't know anybody who could take his place at this moment.

[END]