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Q: What position do you hold with the union?

KK: I'm currently on the executive of the Edmonton local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The other position that I hold is alternate Anglophone for the national union as a union representative.

Q: What's your background?

KK: I grew up in rural Nova Scotia in a small town there. There wasn't a lot of support for unions. The only union I really knew of in the area was the bus drivers. I think they may have gone on strike a couple of times when I was growing up, and we relied on them to go back and forth to a rural school. It wasn't anything that we objected to too much when the bus drivers went on strike. The other thing that supported unions that I grew up encountering was my mother's support for Tommy Douglas. She was a huge fan of Tommy Douglas, and read the papers all the time and kept up to date on news and always talked about Tommy Douglas and the New Democrats, very supportive of them. But I wasn't really involved with anything of that nature myself growing up. In fact, I was involved with a church and used to go on a regular basis and was pretty devout I guess you could say. It was a born-again church, an evangelical church, Evangelical Baptist. My mother was United Baptists so we were raised in the Baptist religion. So that, I guess, constructed my background. Basically we were very poor, we didn't have any money and lived very humbly. My father passed away when I was 13; so it was not an easy life growing up. It was difficult to find work because in Nova Scotia everything was very depressed there. I had good marks in school. My older brother sort of took over the role of father when my dad passed away, and he supported us to get us into something after school that we would carry on. He flew me to Toronto to go for an interview for the Interior Design program at Ryerson. I got scholarships and so on too, but I went into the

Interior Design program with a student loan and did one year there. Went back to Halifax, got a job working in the VG, the Victoria General Hospital, as admitting clerk. I'm not sure how I landed that job, but I did. I ended up quitting the job because my girlfriend in Edmonton phoned me and wanted me to come out and live with her. She said if I came they were desperate for people at the post office. Instead of making \$3.85 an hour in Halifax I would be making \$4.24 in Alberta. I thought that was worth moving across the country for.

Q: What year was that?

KK: 1974. . . . It was 1974 and it was September that I moved across Canada to take a job that paid slightly more than I was making in Halifax. It was also a bit of an adventure for me. I did in fact start working on the midnight shift in the post office a day and a half or two days after I arrived. I was advised to take the midnight shift because it was a better shift to work than afternoon shift, which was the other option. There were a lot of high seniority folks on day shift and it was a small shift; so I went on midnights. There were a lot of young people like me on the shift at that time. There were a lot of women, I would say. It didn't occur to me at the time that that was unusual. But the longer I was there the more I understood that men were hired, lots of men were hired, they didn't last. Men would be there and then disappear because they got a job in the oil field. They were working just until they got called out, things like that. So you saw them desperately trying to fill positions and keep people in them, and they were having a great deal of difficulty with that; so there were a number of women. That's how I started working at Canada Post. I did not get involved with the union right away. But the very first night that I started working at Canada Post I was introduced to a shop steward. I'm not sure if they introduced me to him or he introduced himself, but there were quite a group of shop stewards who were active on that nightshift. I sat with them that first night and played crib and so on and just carried on hanging around with that group. So I was informed about what was happening. Therefore when we ran into problems, which was about a year and a half later that we ran into an issue, I ended up in the office not happy with what my shop steward did, and put my name forward to be a steward.

Q: What was it like working in the post office?

KK: In Edmonton, I hadn't been here for long. I think I came in on a weekend, Saturday night, had never been out here before. The Monday morning they took me down to the personnel department and I got hired. If I'm not mistaken, I went home to sleep so that I could go to work that night. It was either that night or the next night that I went to work, so it was a pretty tight turnaround. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. They showed me where to catch the bus; so I caught the bus. I was living in the Bonnie Doon area. I got off at the employees' entrance and went in. They'd given me a card, or someone came to meet me at the door, I think. There was an escalator that you went up when you came in the door to the second floor where the processing work was. Basically there was mail everywhere and everything was hand-sorted. They'd only just introduced the sorting machines at that time for coding. They took me to the primary – I'm not sure if it was the primary or the finals now – but I was sorting the T6C finals. The Bonnie Doon area where I lived, they put me in that sortation area, which got lots of mail. They were always short there. So that's where I ended up working. I believe that's where they put me the first night, because I didn't know the city breakdown. For primary you had to break down the city by zones east-west, north-south, and understand the postal codes and the named streets. So you had to learn that. So on the final sort it was a memory sort and you just learned where each of the pigeonholes were and you sorted the mail according to address. It had nothing to do with postal code, it was all by address that we were sorting. So that's what I did the first night. I remember being very tired and not really looking around to see what was around me. But it was the stewards who would come over and say, hey it's time for break now, you get to go for the break, come with us. They took me to the lunchroom, brought me back at the right time, told me when I was supposed to move around. It was very dimly lit and there was mail everywhere, and it was like an obstacle course to climb through. There were racks with bags on it where we bundled out and dispatched our mail at a particular time. Then you'd draw the bag shut with a drawstring. They're eliminating those at this point, but in those days that's what we had was bag racks in between all the cases on the finals. Everybody sat and sorted at their cases.

Q: Under pretty close supervision?

KK: Very close supervision. In fact, most of the supervisors were from the military and had gotten jobs in the post office following the war and were still there. It was very tight supervision. There was someone watching you all the time and keeping track of how fast you were sorting. In order to maintain my position, I had to take testing. I had to have a certain speed that I could obtain accuracy, and there were probation reports done on a monthly basis where you sat down and they filled out a report on you and you signed it and they put it in your file. It's still there today, the six months probation report. At the end of it they recommended you either to be retained or released. We were cautioned certainly by the shop stewards that if you miss time for sick don't do that, make sure you come to work. Don't miss any time, don't be late. Do whatever you want after the six months, but don't do that during your six months cuz you won't be there, they'll let you go. Although there was a bit of a labour pressure thing going on that might have tempered that, but it was probably good advice in any respect. But there was labour pressure, cuz they were having trouble filling the positions.

Q: Were your supervisors primarily men?

KK: Absolutely.

Q: Was there anything you noticed about being a woman in a man's job?

KK: It wasn't perceived so much as a man's job where we were working, because we were doing sortation. Some of the women that I was working beside in fact wore skirts to work every day. The entire shift of part-timers on the afternoon shift weren't allowed to have stools, and most of them wore dresses. It was a kind of culture that had developed there, I think; maybe it was related to the war. I don't know. But it was certainly a culture that existed there, and there was a lot of tension over some of those things. Women weren't viewed as equals in the union, they weren't viewed as equals on the work floor,

but we had the same rate of pay. The heavy work, like sorting letters was one thing. The heavy work where you would be asked to clear the cuts, for example, where you had a big tray that you were putting 500 or 600 letters in and carrying that to a final case, because the cuts were full, to put it on the floor stacked there. They would ask the younger women to do that or they'd ask some of the men who were sorting to do that. There was this sort of division of the way the labour was done. The mail handlers were another classification, and all they did was pull the bags when they were full, load them onto wagons, push the wagons away, bring in mail that needed to be distributed. The heavier lifting and moving around of equipment and that sort of thing was done by the men. There were no women mail handlers at that time when I started. Some did come later. They allowed women to work in that area. It was a bit of a revolution when that happened. There were all kinds of incidents around that. There was tension, there was absolutely tension. There were individual things that happened that were not very good. But at the time that I began, there was a large number of us in sort of my age group. I was perhaps a little younger than some of them, having just come out of one year university, but there was a very strong group of all of us around the same age with lots of energy. Most of them had maybe had another job or two and then they'd come there thinking that it was a better job, and it was compared to some of the other jobs that were out there.

Q: You were working at a time when people should be sleeping.

KK: That's right. We'd start at 11 and get off at 7 or started at 11:30 and got off at 8. Prior to the half-hour lunch being paid, I think that's what was happening. But we were working 11 to 7 after the paid half-hour lunch. Prior to that I think it was 11:30 to 8.

Q: What sort of organization was it?

KK: It was a government-run department. That's the whole thing. It was political. There were people that worked there who took great pride in the fact that they worked for Canada Post and were involved in the delivery of the mail, that this was an important public service. It was an army base. The terminology exists today – you're AWOL, you're

absent without leave, and it's routinely used still. You're suspended. There's suspensions. There's insubordination. It happens; this is the stuff that's going on all the time.

Q: So the human resources practices are very much before the human resources approach to management?

A: I have to say though, there was quite a difference between the inside atmosphere and the outside atmosphere – completely different world. The supervisors on the inside tended to be very strict and controlling, and yet our sister union at the time, Letter Carriers Union, had a completely different environment that was taking place in their work area. It wasn't like ours at all, but it took some time for me to realize that, that there was quite a difference between the two. I'm not sure why it was that way, why it was such a stark difference between them. But nevertheless, that's the way it was. You had a 15-minute coffee break and you were timed. You could not leave until your break began and if you did you were disciplined; they were right there. You had to come back on time. They would go up to the lunchroom and stand there when it was time for the coffee break to be completed and you were supposed to leave. Lunch break the same thing, you were timed. Everything was timed. You had a 15-minute coffee break in the first half of your shift, a 15-minute coffee break in the second half, and you had a 30-minute lunch.

Q: Does this explain the distinction between the two unions, that yours was the more militant one of the two?

A: Yes, you remember it correctly, we were the more militant. Depending on how you're talking about it I guess, but the perception within the postal workers at that time was that we were absolutely the more militant, that we were taking on the issues trying to gain rights and benefits for the workers that in the subsequent collective agreement negotiations for the letter carriers they would be granted what we fought for. There is a pattern there. But I'm not sure how much of that is really fair and how much of it was just what was perceived at the time on the work floor. The benefits were very much the same,

what the gains were within the collective agreement. There was a difference of orientation within the unions as well, though.

Q: How did you become involved in the union?

A: As I said, many of us around the same age, we had socialized and intertwined outside of work as well. We often would go for breakfast together after work on midnights, for example. When one of those amongst the group, we came to work one night and he was a supervisor. So that morning we'd gone for breakfast, I don't know, but it felt like that. That night we showed up to work and he'd become our supervisor on the midnight shift. We were stunned by that. We didn't understand why that would've happened. The things that were going on, some things go on and always do in a workplace, that are breaches of the collective agreement, but you don't necessarily follow up on everything or pursue it. You say, well we'll leave that to somebody who's in the union, they'll take care of that. At that particular time, it was that week and I'm not sure if it was the same night but it was that week that we saw him, and I guess it would've been difficult for him suddenly not being a worker, to stand around with his pockets and watch everybody else work. So when we were supposedly all working on our final sorts that had left the primary. Someone walked by and saw him pulling mail that he wasn't supposed to pull, because he's now a supervisor, he's not a worker anymore. So the word passed and five or six of us watched him and saw him doing it, and we filed a grievance that he was doing our work. The grievance went forward. The individual for the union who was in charge of putting the grievance forward at that time decided to brag to the head guy in management that he had people that were filing grievances. I don't know if that was some kind of strange thing or it was just because on that issue. So that individual, the next morning when he came in, cuz he'd come in at the end of our shift, the last half hour or hour overlapped, and he called each of us individually into his office and interrogated us. He had a steward sit in the chair throughout. She didn't speak to us before or after; she was told to sit there. He was a very tough guy, difficult, and it was an interrogation. You'd barely get an answer out and then he'd cut you off, and then he'd come back and ask you the same thing again and try and catch us up. But it was true; so we won our grievance.

But I think three of us became stewards after that, cuz we didn't like the way we were treated. We worked very hard. We never tried to shirk our work. We worked very hard to do a good job. We were conscientious. We were just doing what we were supposed to be doing. For him to treat us that way and to question whether or not we were telling the truth, that really pushed us over the line. So I put in to become a shop steward right away. But I also was not happy that the steward had sat there and not said anything. I forgave her. I understood later what was going on there. It was a very intimidating situation for her. She had difficulty speaking up or defending in that situation. She was basically sitting there trembling throughout the interview.

Q: How well did the union support you so that you could be a good steward?

KK: There was a lot of training at that time. Because there were so many of us that were really keen to get involved, they created this themselves, Canada Post, in the way they dealt with us. We responded by saying, okay well I'm gonna learn what my rights are and I'm going to stand up for myself and I'm gonna stand up for other people and I'm not gonna be treated this way and I'm not gonna let you treat other people this way. There was a whole group of us and there was a lot of training that was being offered at the time locally but also regionally. It wasn't only in Edmonton that we were seeing these kinds of numbers coming forward who wanted to become stewards. There was a real growth going on across the country.

Q: How well did the women support its female members?

KK: In those days things were different for women than they are now, although I've been seeing sort of a return to some of the things that we fought so hard to eliminate; they're coming back now. Disappointing, but that's the way it is. At that time there was support for women to be involved, maybe not the purest of intentions in the union, because it was kind of an active dating thing going on. But they were encouraging anyone who wanted to be a steward to be involved. They didn't have much choice, really. They had to take the

workforce they had. They weren't having a lot of men who were staying. A lot of men were working in the oilfield jobs, and they paid a lot more. They had what they had.

Q: The union took on some women's issues.

KK: Eventually they did. Going to some of those early conventions in the '80s and being on the picket line in '81 for 42 days when we won paid maternity leave – those were historical events. But it wasn't because there was a broad-based support within the local that they were demanding this take place. It was the other way around. It was the union doing what needed to be done, doing the right things, and then explaining to the membership why that had to happen that way, why that was a good choice, why we needed to support that sort of activity or that sort of direction.

Q: You were blessed with good leadership.

KK: Yes, Jean Claude Parrot. He had a lot to do with it. On his own, certainly not, but there was a strong leadership there that understood the issues and understood beyond that the role that the union needed to play in society, not just within the workplace. It wasn't a workplace thing. We were on the edge of changing the way that we looked at human rights and values and what was important in making those sorts of considerations – taking that into consideration but also understanding the depth of the issue as well. So in approaching the education in that way and doing it in the way that they did, we all were able to move forward in the same way with the same understanding and then move to the next step. The creation of women's committees I think had a lot to do with the changes that took place in the workplace. Involvement in those was sometimes a dangerous thing to do; you were rejected by your coworkers. Some of this stuff is sort of cutting edge. They think you're a bra-burning feminist if you are attending a women's committee meeting, not understanding what a women's committee does or having any sort of understanding of the roles of feminists in society as it relates to postal workers. Where's the connection? How does that work? It takes time for those things to change, for attitudes to change.

Q: What was happening to the corporation at that time?

KK: We were taking on some issues. Not all the campaigns were successful. The boycott the postal code one, for example, didn't succeed so well. That was about the mechanization of the work, anticipating that if they were able to get everyone to put postal codes on their mail then they wouldn't need people to sort it; machines could sort it. That's correct. We have more and more sophisticated machines all the time that can read the writing, everything is going right to the walk number. Very little needs to be touched by a person; a person doesn't need to sort it. The primaries, the short and long primaries, disappeared, where there was mail that came in in a bag and you dumped it and lined it up on a shelf and then broken open the elastics and sorted it into the cubicles that it went to. Those were eliminated. Instead the mail was processed by machine. It came in in containers and it didn't need to be broken down until it got to the letter carrier depot where it was going.

Q: So what happened to your work?

KK: Well there was always some things that couldn't be sorted through a machine – airmail letters, for example. The machines in the beginning, there weren't enough of them to keep up with all the mail. So they would just do a little bit of the mail. Not everybody used the postal code. So you couldn't do anything with that. That's not the case now; now it can just read the handwriting. But at that time the primary sort was there because we didn't have enough machines to handle the volume. I worked in the coding section for a while. The machine would run through to a final FSA, a final sortation area. It would be, for example, the east end of Edmonton where the postal code is T5A, it would sort everything to there and we would run it through a plan. The plan was everything in T5A going down to letter carriers cuts. So then you'd empty that cut into a sleeve and it would go out to letter carrier depot 5, and depot 5 letter carriers who delivered to T5A area would then take their sleeves of mail and sort it into their cases to the walk, to the individual houses on their individual walks.

Q: So the workers who formerly stuffed mail into pigeonholes, what were they relegated to doing now?

KK: There's more doing mechanized in the mechanized section, cuz they have more machines so they need more staff to run those machines.

Q: What do staff do who run those machines?

KK: Well things have changed so much there. I haven't worked in the mech section since all of those changes have taken place. But they will sit in front of a screen where there's an image of a letter and the address, and send that to where it needs to go. They punch in keys. They don't have the actual physical letter in front of them now, which we did, where there's suites and it would drop down in front of you and you would code it and it would shoot down a chute moved by rubber belts and go to the right spot. It doesn't work that way now. There's no need for that. There's still the big machines that are running through and taking everything right down to the letter carrier walk, but it's much more efficient now. But there's more of them. And there's still the parcel sortation that's taking place. So there's still people that are coding on the parcels. There's still bundles of mail, like magazines for example, but more and more what we're going through right now is this postal transformation. The modern post, it's a huge issue for us at the moment. We're seeing many, many jobs being lost, and downsizing and efficiencies being achieved through mechanization that are absolutely losing lots of jobs.

Q: What were some of the human issue factors?

KK: The health and safety was always a big issue. There's always been many injuries in the post office in the work that we're doing – lifting types of injuries. More so now I think we're seeing injuries with the type of approach that's being taken by the corporation that is creating psychological problems for individuals if they have some sort of health issue and the way it's being dealt with. In any workplace you're not going to have the same

attitude for every single area, every supervisor identical – it's not that way. Some are much nicer than others and more human, and it's not as bad as in other areas. But the overall approach has been standardized in some way by the corporation. The disability managers, the companies that they get to manage if you're off on any kind of leave, it's just not a good place to be injured. I can't really talk about exactly what it is. Statistically, I can't give you the statistics on where the areas are where the most injuries are taking place, but it is a dangerous place to work. There's more and more effort being put into now, I think, discouraging reporting of injuries, because of the way that they deal with someone when they've been injured. It's not the same for everybody but that's the thing of working in the union, you see things that others don't. I guess that's what changes when you become involved with the union. The approach you take is not what is the best for me. What is the best for the group? What is the best for us as a collective? What is being done to somebody else could happen to you. You need to know what's happening and we need to stand together in that sense of working as a group and looking out for each other.

Q: What were your involvements with the union?

KK: I went on the executive very soon after I became a steward. I was invited to be the recording secretary, I believe, which is sort of an entry position. There were seven people on the local executive then. So I would go to meetings and take notes, take minutes. Then I'd write the minutes in the book; we didn't type them up then, but I'd write them in a book and leave them there in the legally bound binder, the handwritten notes for the meetings. That was for the executive meetings and for the general membership meetings. I don't really remember, I guess maybe the education committee, I might've been involved with that. Certainly *The Inside Out* and helping to distribute that. I remember writing an article for *The Inside Out*. I'm currently the editor and that's our local newsletter; it's called *The Inside Out*. I remember writing an article for *The Inside Out* and it was rejected by the current editor, who said it wasn't good enough to put in the paper, which we put out on a monthly basis or ten times a year. I was kind of taken aback by that. So I thought, okay I don't write well enough to write articles for *The Inside Out*. So I drew a cartoon. I had always done cartooning, drawing, it was a personal interest.

My mother painted; it was just something we did. That's one of the reasons I ended up applying at Ryerson and going into Interior Design, because I had an art portfolio that I showed them. So I drew a cartoon. No one else was drawing cartoons, and my cartoon got in *The Inside Out*. So I continued to draw cartoons that made jokes about what was going on in the workplace to make people laugh at the situation that we were facing. Sometimes they looked like people that we were working with. I enjoyed that and I still do that today. I still draw just because I like to. I don't have any formal training in that; I just like to draw and so I do draw. So I've continued with that. As editor, well since that time I found out that actually I'm able to write. It's just one of those things that happens sometimes. So I've been involved with that still. I got involved with some clear language work--actually, within that capacity and through the education work as well that I was doing. I do facilitation and pension and benefits and that sort of technical stuff, because I worked fulltime as the secretary treasurer for ten years in the Edmonton local and I developed some skills during that time period. The women's committee, though, has always been something that almost fit when I first started going to it. I was taken aback by the negative attitude people had toward the women's committee when I first started going, but I felt at home there and I wanted to do more with the women's committee. Certainly, growing up with my mother very strong, independent feminist in her own right, I think that prepared me. Why would I live in a way different from what I had always seen her do? Without really evaluating it too much, I just felt that was a place I should be. As time went on I became more involved with the women's committee. The women's committee took on different form as time went on. The committee's most successful period was when we were meeting with the letter carriers union women as well. We weren't together as a union but we were doing joint things together. That helped a lot at the time when the merger came, because we did know each other. We did work together; we did things together with the Alberta Federation of Labour and with the Edmonton District Labour Council. So we knew each other as activists in the community and we were friendly with each other. We knew each other from picket lines and strikes. So you're passing in and out of the same building and you're walking together on the line and supporting each other. So it was a good place here in Edmonton around all of those issues, I guess quite different from things that happened in other parts of the country.

Here before the merger we sat down together and decided, win or lose – cuz we were voting on who was gonna be the union that represented – win or lose, this is how many people who'd be on the executive, this is how everything will be structured, and in the end we'd find out who won but we didn't care because our local was going to be based in this way, which was very good. We moved forward together without much difficulty. It takes time, though, for some of those things. Everyone cared very deeply about their union, and the letter carriers union was no exception. They fought very hard to win the vote. Some of those things that happened around that time period went on for years after. There were groups that hid money. It wasn't the main group, but there were some within the group that were fighting all the way through. It wasn't just that it went to a vote and now it's over, let's carry on with that. There were some things like that that continued.

Q: What issues did the women's committee take on?

KK: The Edmonton local at this time currently we have a very active women's committee. We've been active for 12 years perhaps, that same group of us. We've been doing annual women's conferences. That started one or two years into us getting the committee going, cuz there was a period of time where the committee didn't work – there was nobody meeting and it just sort of fell into a rest period I guess. Individuals move around. There were very strong individuals within the letter carriers union that were moving the women's committee forward, like Lynn Bue and Laura Lee and Emma Geau and Beth Nielsen I think was there. There were individuals moving it forward but the length of time and the meetings would just take place once in a while. There might be particular issues that they would go out and circulate. This issue is happening, we need to get out there and work on that. So then some of us would join in with that as well. It might be organizing around, I remember us organizing around a rape crisis centre initiative that we were doing. We did a meeting in particular where we planned how we were going to support the work of the rape crisis center because of some things that had taken place in the community that they were involved with and we wanted to support. It was more of connecting with the community--things that were happening and that they could come to us. Some of that might've been around Take Back the Night, that there was

some involvement with that. Locally the committee that we've had recently has done some work with Take Back the Night but only a little bit, only marginally. More of our focus has been around building a committee that women within our workplace can identify with in the local and that they feel supports them – a place where they can come and talk about what's going on in their workplace. Not being involved with the union, being rank and file, they can ask questions and feel it's a way to connect with the union. We've seen some of those women go on to the executive and various roles within the local. At the same time, we try and keep the analysis there about what is a feminist and how does a feminist work in the workplace and work within our union. How do we build more feminists for the future?

Q: What changes have you seen?

KK: I'm saddened by the number of women who are in leadership positions at this time compared to what we did have at one point. I'm questioning whether it is something that is now on a downward trend. Is that what we're seeing, or is this going to be balanced out in some way? The tougher it is to get work the more likely you're gonna see jobs not given to women. You think that you've achieved certain things but I'm not really sure how you achieve those things for the long term. It's the approach in general of society – are they accepting of those changes? I'm not sure. I saw a button on my dresser yesterday that said, elect more women. It was a campaign that was going on here and I had the button. How do you do that? How do you elect more women? You choose women instead of men? If a woman's running for a position, you don't run against her if you're a man? Exactly how do you do that? We just came through our national convention as postal workers in October and we have exactly the same number of women on our national executive committee as we had going in. But we didn't have any women running against men for those positions, either. I think we're at sort of an odd time. It's not just our union, I know it's others as well, that we're not quite sure what's down the road for us. I felt that uncertainty there too. We have two women on our national executive committee; the other five positions are held by men. The national executive board is all men. So when you add the board and the committee together, there's still just two. The board includes

the committee, is one way to put it. The eight regions each have a national director that make up the board, so there's 15 on the board, which includes the committee. So we've got two women on the committee, therefore we have two women on the board.

Q: Have dominant attitudes changed the work of the women's committee?

KK: I don't know how we can move forward if we don't have women's committees. Some people argue that we don't need them anymore; I don't agree. I think we need women's committees. How do we assess where we are at and what needs to be done if we don't have an opportunity to meet together and make those decisions? I think they're vital. The particular way that women encounter the workplace, encounter the union, is only something a woman can encounter, because of where we're coming from. I see this many times talking with women who are having an issue in the workplace, and how they respond is linked to how they've been dealing with issues in their home life and the kinds of experiences they've had. The statistics don't support that they've avoided violence. This is a reality, and violence takes many forms. I don't know how we have a safe place to talk about those issues and move forward and gain the skills we need to move forward and make changes if we don't have a safe place to do that. I think that's what a women's committee is.

Q: The change of the government organization into a crown corporation – what are your observations about it?

KK: I have a bumper sticker on an old suitcase that says, crown corporation will deliver. The union was absolutely in favor of the crown corporation and was lobbying for it, because we were getting caught in between all these government departments. We couldn't get any changes made, we couldn't seem to be able to negotiate anything significant in areas where we wanted to go because it would be, well that's the treasury department, or no, that's this department. So we wanted a crown corporation so that we had one person at the table that we could negotiate with and it wouldn't be, well I'm sorry, we've already done this or we've already done that. So no, the union wanted the crown

corporation. We campaigned for it. We had bumper stickers made up; I have one on my suitcase.

Q: How is it working?

KK: Well I don't know if I'm the right person to answer that question. Did we achieve the strategy? Yes, we can sit down and negotiate all at once. But if you saw the outcome of our last negotiations, we're still in the middle of those negotiations because the government stepped in and said, we're not gonna back off here, we're gonna take an active role. We're now at the point where we're gonna be going in front of someone who's gonna make a choice between an offer that we make for our collective agreement and the employer makes. We're dealing with one person; we're not getting shuffled between government departments. But the attitude of the government's role in the post office didn't get removed by turning it into a crown corporation. It doesn't stop a government from interfering with collective bargaining, if that's what they choose to do. When you have a majority government, I think we've seen the way that the government is interfering with free collective bargaining. It's not just us – Air Canada just went through this as well. CAW. I don't know. At the time it seemed like the right thing to do. I think we made some gains because of that. So is it current today that we would say? I think today it's more the government interference with free collective bargaining that's the issue, not the fact that it's a crown corporation.

Q: What about the corporation's view of the service that it's supposed to deliver? Has that changed?

KK: The corporation makes a profit. But you're correct if that's what you're looking for, yes. The way that the corporation functions has changed from the time it became a crown corporation to the current day. It hasn't stayed the same and some of it varied, depending on who was the head of the corporation, their philosophy, and who was on the board of directors. Those things all shift. So the approach to privatization of the post office in the way that they're going now, everything driven by balancing this out against that, we don't

have the money for that yet they're making a profit. They want to pay corporate team incentive, was what went into the last collective agreement, the one before this one, against our objections. We didn't want the corporate team incentive. They want to be able to sort of connect with the individual worker in the post office and give them a bonus, which the worker can perceive as being a result of their productivity, their loyalty to the corporation, and trying to undermine the strength of the union within the workplace.

Q: Is the union still strong and vibrant?

KK: I think so, I think so. The union is I think still strong and still vibrant, and in some ways more so than ever. But those things change too – the way that we perceive a strength or a vibrancy within the union is different now. There's a lot of connection on Facebook and there's a lot of Facebooking and Twitter and connecting through the internet, through cell phones, that we wouldn't have seen years ago. Those connections are there. So that builds groups of individuals too within the union. We have to always be aware of that, that technology is changing, to be able to keep in step with that as well. The harsher the corporation is towards employees, the harsher they are, the more likely that they're developing a strong union. They are our best recruiter, my own case in point. The reason I got involved was because of the harsh way in which I was treated by the corporation. So I decided to find out what my rights were. A few years ago we saw them, especially around the time of the CTI coming in, the corporate team incentive, they were trying to hug everybody. We really care about you, we can provide you with everything you need, come to us if you have a problem, we have an open door policy – that sort of approach to things. They give you pizza and donuts and whatever, and for a little while it seemed they were having a bit of a breakthrough there, that members were feeling a bit warmer toward them, maybe not quite as standoffish. Then I think the lockout in June really wasn't a good move for labour relations with the post office. Workers were really upset; our members were really upset about that. You develop a worker who wants to take pride in their work and productivity and all this, and they massage all those things because they wanna build a relationship with the individual where they think about the corporation before their own wellbeing. Then they barricade the mail in the building that

you wanna take out to give to your customers who you have a personal relationship with because you're anxious to do a good job, and they won't let you hand out the mail. I think that set them back a long ways in that area.

Q: Could you talk about the strike in '81?

KK: In 1981, well let me say that I've been on several strikes with Canada Post, and I'll come back to '81. The first one was in 1975. I wasn't a steward at the time, I started in '74. The strike was a 42 day strike and I was still working on the midnight shift. I hadn't been contacted by anyone to go on picket duty. So I was at home. Someone called me and said, would you like to picket? I said, sure, where do you want me to go? So I went down and picketed next to the CN Tower. By the time I'd come to Edmonton it was the fall and I realized that this was not like the winters that I was used to in Nova Scotia, not that they were balmy, but they were certainly cold here and a very thorough cold. So I got a parka from Inuvik; so I had a hood and parka. When they asked me picket I needed it, because it was very cold and very windy. There were maybe five of us on the line when they were sending me there, and I know now it was probably because that's when it was thinnest.

. . . Yes, 1975. They called me to come down and I was wearing my parka. I'm trying to remember now when it ended; I know it was 42 days. I think it ended the beginning of December perhaps, but it was very cold. I picketed for I think about three weeks, the last three weeks of the strike, or from the middle of the strike onward. I now know that historically there were some things going on that contributed to all that. I do remember the last few days of picketing I showed up to picket and suddenly there were all kinds of people there. That was because they'd been reporting that there was some sort of breakthrough, that things were gonna be settled, so people were coming down to picket, to put in a last few days of picketing before it ended. I still didn't become a steward until early the next year, and I told you about that. The next time that I was on strike was 1978, that was the illegal strike, the one that we all remember. That was the strike that I knew if I was going to be fired for not returning to work, that I would be fired. I wasn't going

back. Of course I wasn't the only one who felt that way, felt very strongly that way. The leadership understood that, so they worked that out so that we all did go back.

Q: What was the main issue, and what made it illegal?

KK: I can't say that. I couldn't say for sure. You should ask that to somebody who can explain it. I'm not gonna answer that, cuz I don't really know the answer definitively. In 1981 we were out on strike again for 42 days. That one was in the summertime, in July and August. Those of us on the picket line weren't thinking that we were on strike for maternity leave. I know that this was a breakthrough and this was a big thing, and even this year we're celebrating that we won maternity leave on that strike. But for many of us on the picket line it wasn't what we thought we were on strike for. We were on strike because they wouldn't negotiate with us and we didn't get what we wanted and what was in the package. I don't know; they just didn't give us what we wanted. So we were out there on principle. There was a strong base of us at that point, and we had a great summer. For many of us it was one strike that we reflect back on very fondly. It was July and August and it was Alberta and it was pretty nice weather. There were no scabs crossing our lines, no buses trying to run through, which is what came later – it was terrifying, it was horrible. Then when we returned to the work floor when the strike ended, we found out that we got maternity leave. For some of us who were childbearing age it was okay. I don't really see myself using that, but whatever. But for some of the older women who knew they wouldn't use it, they were not happy, some of them. Others thought it would be good that we would have that. Like my mother-in-law was off a week for her last child. She worked on the midnight shift at the post office and she was off for one week, then she went back to work. So the reality was you didn't get leave. They saw it as, they understood it, but some of the men that we worked with – and I have to say it was more of the older generation that we worked with – were furious with the notion that we would've been on strike to achieve maternity leave. We took that heat on the work floor on a regular basis. If you were a union steward, you got a lot more of that dissatisfaction expressed to you because they wanted the union to know how they felt about it. We saw it in meetings and so on too within the local. As I explained to you

before, sometimes the leadership was ahead of the membership. That's logical, that's what was happening. So yes, we celebrate that and it was a great gain and we were excited about it, but it wasn't what most of us thought we were walking the line for every day cuz I'm gonna get maternity leave. No, the clarity of what was emerging at the negotiating table came as we walked, came later, came with the daily bulletins about what was happening. There were other strikes after that. There was one that went through a weekend for four days that the letter carriers union had gone out. I was working weekends at the time, and we respected the picket line. But it seemed to go back and forth – it would be us, it would be them. We're all at the same thing at the main plant and we've got the line going. There were labour disruptions. That's for sure. There was a strike routine that we got into – you got the signs, you got the picket captains, you got the sign up; you kept the duty rosters on hand somewhere cuz you're gonna need those again, and we'll go from there.

Q: There was one in '83 where the company reacted badly.

KK: There were some very ugly strikes with the scabs and scab buses being run through, school buses with plywood on the windows, and coming through very quickly. Or highway drivers, the drivers that would come in to pick up the mail with the big transport trucks trying to go through the line to get in and out. It was heartbreaking because it was the way that the corporation was responding to our right to bargain and negotiate. They were risking lives on the line, and standing there to make sure, then trying to line up the police to arrest us and pull us away to keep their business going. It was not something that we look back on fondly at that time. It was not a good thing. But again, there we are trying to fight to keep our rights.

Q: How did you experience the history of militancy?

KK: I haven't really thought about how that came about. I think you have to give credit to the leadership in the local at the time, who did an excellent job. I've always thought that – probably the best I've ever seen – of communicating and connecting. The things

that were going on, we weren't in the dark, we knew what was happening, there were constant communiqués. I refer to '81 – the Picket Line Press or whatever we had called it – there would be daily reports coming out and someone would be charged with that role to sit there and write up the stuff and get it out on the line so everyone knew what was happening. But building up to that time so you could identify who was going to be on the picket line, who was going to be the strike captain, the picket captain for example. That support network had to be there to begin with or you couldn't do it, and it was there on a daily basis. It was there monthly when we had our meetings and when we had committee meetings. Every time we met we built connections and built community. The leadership at that time when I first started to get involved – and like I said, many of us knew at that time and many of us all went along together and got involved together at the same time – there was great connection. You had a personal phone call at least once a week from the local president. You're active on the executive but someone would always call and say, okay so what's going on at work, what are the issues, tell me what's taking place? Do you have any questions, do you wanna know how to do things? Okay, this is how you could approach that. Well why don't you come in and we'll go through that? Or here, I can give you this or I can put you in touch with this person. You were asked, well you're interested in that sort of thing, why don't you come on this committee and meet at this time? Then someone would make sure the committee actually had a meeting and took minutes and there were reports from it. You felt engaged in what you were doing, that the work you were doing was important and people wanted to hear from you. There was always a means for you to report on what was going on, and what you had to say was important and played a role. So it built a community, and it built a community that relied on the union for support but also knew how they could affect the union to make the union better too. There was this sense of a growing, living entity that needed to be protected, but you were also part of it. You were part of something exciting that was happening. My first convention was in 1980. The one before that was in '77 in Halifax right after I began being active. My first convention was in 1980 and I've been to each since then except for one when I was off on maternity leave. I watched Brother Parrot talk about the issues that were facing us and who we were as a union and what we needed to do. Others across the country got up at convention and talked about those issues as well. It was an exciting

time, it really was. It was there that I first saw extensive debate on whether we needed a women's committee. I think the resolution came from the Vancouver local, cuz Vancouver had a really active group of women within CUPW who were fighting to get rights for women – the right to abortion, sexual harassment language in our constitution. It was in our collective agreement but also in our union that we had protection against harassment, which was really important. The heat they took getting up from Vancouver and arguing about those sorts of things, and the men getting up from other parts of the country and saying, well there is no harassment going on, why are we talking about these issues, feeling very uncomfortable with it all. You could see the face of the union changing in front of you as you went to these events. The conventions at that time would go not all night, but close – 3 in the morning that we'd stop, then come back at 9. It was pretty extreme, pretty extreme, things we don't do now but then we did. There was a lot of passion around all of these issues, and amazing debate. Not always good decisions, but we did it together. . . . I'm not gonna compare this last convention to those, but things are different and we're moving in different ways. At this convention, we decided to go to convention every four years. We had been doing them every three and in those years we were doing them every three as well, but now we've got to every four. Part of that is because of the costs, the extreme costs. Everybody's making difficult decisions these days.

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

KK: I don't think so. . . .

At one time all seven members of the Edmonton local executive were women. It was different here, it really was. Mona Sykes was the president, Delores Herman was vice president, all seven of us were women. We weren't getting objections from the work floor on that – we were doing a good job. I'm not sure who was president in '82, was Mona president in '81? Maybe she was, I think she could've been. We have lots of photos of that strike in the local, her standing on a park bench there by the CN Tower addressing the crowd with her megaphone. I think you might be in some of those pictures too. She's in B.C. now.

[END]