

Kim Conway

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UNIFOR Office, Ft. McMurray

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk & Don Bouzek Camera: Don Bouzek

KC: I'm the safety chairperson for Unifor local 707A. I have been in that position for a little over a year and a half. Prior to that, I've been working at Suncor as a lab technician since 2001.

Q: Tell us about your background.

KC: I grew up in Gander, Newfoundland. My mom did work in a unionized environment; my dad didn't. My mom wasn't a big union activist though. She did the basics I guess - like I'm sure she voted and what-not. I went to school there, graduated high school, and then I went to university in St. John's, Newfoundland. While I was in there, I did work part time during the summers at Newfoundland Telephone at the time, which was actually a unionized workplace as well. It was CEP, so the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union. I was a dues paying member there, however I wasn't active in the union at all, just being a student. So I graduated university in 1998 and then looked for work. Couldn't find any work back in Newfoundland, and that was when I decided to move to Fort McMurray. I had family up here; my mom's sister and her brother and their families lived here. So I came up and encroached on those guys and started working. So not very heavily involved in the union until I got to Fort McMurray, and actually until I started at Suncor a few years later.

Q: What year was that?

KC: I started at Suncor in 2001, so prior to that. I was here for probably a couple of months. I came here in February of 1999 and I was here for two months before I could even get a job. So fresh out of university, had no experience, nothing. I'd be applying for jobs, anything at this point. At first, I started off of course at Suncor and Syncrude and all the other smaller companies, and couldn't even get a job at Safeway as a cashier. The thing was, everyone figured you have a university degree, you're not going to stay. So I couldn't even get interviews, nothing like that. Finally I got on at McMurray Resources Research and Testing, MRRT, and I was there until I started at Suncor. That was a non-union company and they really do need a union there for sure.

Q: What makes you say that?

KC: Just that there was never any consistency with regards to wages. The person working next to me was making less than me. They would pay me more so that I would stay longer, because I had a degree. Even though we were doing the exact same work, I was paid more.

Q: What did you get your degree in?

KC: I did a Bachelor of Science degree with a Biology major and a Psych minor.

Q: What were your first impressions of Fort McMurray, and have your thoughts about the place changed over time or remained the same?

KC: Probably remained the same. I moved here from St. John's, so it was a bigger centre. The population wasn't as big as St. John's, but it was a nice little town, or city I guess, a small city at that point. I lived with my family for the first year - or two years almost - that I was here. So that kind of keeps you a little bit more grounded, I guess, just because you're not out by yourself. You still have family suppers and things like that, so it's not like if I came up here by myself and was living in an apartment by myself, where I might be more out there.

Q: What impression did you have of the town?

KC: There's been a shift in the cultures more so than anything else. When I first moved here, the vast majority - when people talked about people from out of town - it was Newfoundlanders. You had Newfies; there were Newfies all over the place. Now there's still lots of Newfies here, but there's so many more cultures that are here in addition to us transplanted Newfoundlanders for sure. So in the lab where I worked, there's probably 42 or 43 unionized employees and then we have almost, well not quite as many, staff employees as well, from that particular area. I believe they said it's 19 different countries that we all come from, so quite diverse. I think that's probably the biggest change that I've seen since I came to Fort McMurray. It was always somewhat culturally diverse but now it's like a huge melting pot.

Q: What difference does that make to the community?

KC: Just a lot more different views, especially with regards to safety, I think. Some of the countries now that our community is coming from, they have different, countries that they originally came from have different views on safety. They're not as stringent as what they are here in Canada. Sometimes they take those values with them, and don't quite see the difference.

Q: What work did you do for Suncor?

KC: I started at Suncor in 2001 as a temp employee in the lab. At the time, they had already hired seven or eight of us all at the same time. We were all hired when Millennium started up, their new upgrader. I was there as a temp for three years, which is typically unheard of, just because everyone kept saying, if you push them they're not going to hire you. I was the last one out of all of them that were hired there. Essentially the union told them that if they didn't hire me as a fulltime employee, since I could obviously do the job, I had been there for three years, that they wouldn't allow them to have any more temps, because it's an agreement between the union and the company to hire temp employees. So I was there for three years before I finally got hired as a fulltime

employee. That had an effect of course on my seniority, my pay, my pension, all of those things. So I was there kind of in limbo I guess for that amount of time.

Q: What is the Millennium project all about? What were you doing in the lab?

KC: In the lab, we test all of the samples, all the product that goes down the pipeline. We test all the ponds, the water that comes from the river, the water that goes back into the river. We test all the gases, we test the vast majority of the extraction samples. Almost everything is tested there. During the process, the oil sand comes from the mine, goes down through the extraction process where it gets separated from bitumen mineral and water. The bitumen content then goes to the refinery or the upgrader I guess, where it gets made into gas oil diesel and we use naphtha of course in the process as well. So all of the product that gets sent down the pipeline we do test in the lab. We test for sulfur, nitrogen, all kinds of different things.

Q: Tell us more about the product that comes out of this plant.

KC: We do a whole bunch of different blends that come out of our upgrader. A lot of it goes, well it all goes down the pipeline in various phases I guess. We have the ultra low sulfur diesel, which goes down - comes out I guess - comes out of Enbridge, goes down the pipeline that way. Then it goes through further refining, when it gets to Edmonton at the refineries down there. So what we do send down the pipeline is like you said a synthetic crude, some of it. We do send some very thin bitumen that goes down as well.

Q: What is the dirty oil that people are talking about?

KC: When they say dirty oil, it's that we're taking it out of the ground, but we're not putting anything back in its place, even though we do a huge reclamation project and reclaim all the land that we disturb through our mining. They say that it's dirty because we're putting up so much more emissions and whatnot from our upgrader.

Q: So the synthetic crude itself isn't any dirtier than any other oil that we use?

KC: I don't think so, no. Then they talk about, as well, all the blood that's spilled from the oil that they take over in the Middle East. So comparative, I guess.

Q: But the content of it isn't dirtier.

KC: No.

Q: It's the process that's dirty.

KC: Yes.

Q: What about the claims that oil companies are poisoning the environment?

KC: All the water that we take out of the river and all the water that we put back is all tested to ensure that there's not high particulates in it, that it's clean. We do a lot of different testing on the water besides even just particulates. It's tested for carbon, wait now, I've been out of the lab for a little bit. Anyways, we do a lot of testing with the water that goes back in there. Are we using a lot of the water? Yes we do use water out of the river. It has been cut back quite a bit in the past few years. The amount that we take now is little compared to what Suncor did take in the past. A lot of the water that we use within our process is used from our tailings ponds or just kept within the process.

Q: What about the emissions?

KC: We're allowed so much emission by the government. There are times when we have exceeded the limits; it all gets reported back to Environment. The amount of emissions that we generate here at our plant is very little compared to other just regular business that goes on in manufacturing and whatnot throughout other industries.

Q: So Suncor workers are not the villains who are devastating our land.

KC: No, I don't think so.

Q: What about the reclamation?

KC: All the land that is disturbed by our mining is reclaimed. How they do it is they remove the top layer, which they call overburden. They take that and it all gets stowed away or stored away I guess, and then they mine the bitumen, the oil sand. After that's all taken out then the overburden goes back into place after, during the process, and then they plant trees and do various things to bring the wildlife back into that area again.

Q: Does that happen?

KC: Oh yes, absolutely. They've planted millions of trees out there onsite. We just recently reclaimed pond 1, I believe it was. Have you had the opportunity to get out there onsite?

Q: I've driven around part of it. I've seen pictures from the air that look like a moonscape.

KC: Yes, it is a huge footprint, when you look at it. But that's the thing. Originally it is a huge footprint. It's vast. But all that eventually will be reclaimed, once all the oil sand is taken out of it.

Q: When did you get involved with the union?

KC: I have been a union member since I started at Suncor. Even as a temp employee, I was a union member. I did get, like I said, hired permanently fulltime in 2004. At that time, that was in the spring so May 2004 I got hired fulltime. Then that following fall, I

got pregnant with my first child, or my only child, I guess now. So when I went back after my mat leave, I was a single parent. Now at this point, I had been married, had a child, got divorced. So when I went back they had a need for a safety rep. So that was how it kind of started, that they needed a shift safety rep.

All through my life I'd always been raised to help others and be kind and all that stuff, and I've never been one to shy away from anything. I was vocal and always knew my rights as an employee. So I figured, yes, I'd take on that role as a shift safety rep. Then within a month I was the area safety rep and so I actually was asked to go to the first western region women's conference for my union, which at the time was CEP. So I went to that conference and I was nominated to become the Alberta rep on that committee, the first western region women's committee. So I said, sure, I'll do it. You're open to new things and it's always a good cause and whatnot, so I did that. When I came back from that conference, I was asked to help co-chair Suncor's United Way campaign as the union co-chair with the company. So I did that, so I guess I was out there a little bit more, again helping the community with the United Way campaign. So I did that.

After that the position for the safety vice chairperson came available, and I was encouraged by my coworkers that I should run for that position as well. I thought, hmm, it'll give me an opportunity to get out there and meet some more people and to ensure the safety of all my coworkers now, not just my coworkers in the lab but my coworkers all across site. So I thought, hmm, this'll be another good idea. So I ran for that position. So I was in that position until I took this position that I have now as the safety chairperson. I did a lot of different things with regards to the union in between all that. I was trained as a rank and file organizer with the CEP. I was also on the national women's committee with the CEP. I was a steward, chief steward, so very involved. I was the chair of the women's committee until I took this position. This position is quite time consuming, so I just didn't have the time to give the women's committee chair position that much time when I took this one, so I resigned from there. So I've been very involved. Initially when I started to become involved in the union I had a lot of great mentors that are still I guess mentors to me today.

Q: Who are some of them?

KC: Angela Adams, Sue Pierce, Wally Ewaniuk, Roland LaForte – they've been great. They've helped me a lot throughout the years, whether it was organizing or women's committee or just being involved with my local. They've been great.

Q: What's the structure of the health and safety program? Is it a joint program with the employer?

KC: Yes. We do have a joint health and safety committee that is structured through our collective agreement and through policies that Suncor has. Suncor is not required by OH&S to have a joint health and safety committee, but we do have it through our collective agreement. So our structure is, I'm the safety chairperson for the union side. Then we have a safety vice chairperson. We have currently 30 area safety reps

throughout oil sands and in situ, so it includes Firebag as well, all just union people. Then we have another probably almost 100 shift safety reps as well. So I have about a little over 120 area and shift safety reps through oil sands and in situ.

Q: That's covering how many employees?

KC: Currently at Suncor right now, we have 3,600 or 3,800 employees at Suncor, and then we had an addition little over 100 at Firebag.

Q: What are the provisions for working with the employer through that joint program, and how well is it working?

KC: It's not bad. We still do have a lot of work to do. Within our collective agreement, we do have call for a joint health and safety committee. So all of the area safety reps meet monthly with the company – various managers, supervisors, directors, whoever attends. It varies, mostly for the company portion of it. So we meet monthly to bring forward concerns and address issues that are still outstanding from months previous. Just recently, although we have had in our collective agreement for some time, we instated what we call the central safety committee. That is an opportunity for a much higher level to address any issues that are outstanding on various joint health and safety committees all across our worksite. So that central safety committee is made up of myself as the safety chairperson, our president for our local, who's currently Ken Smith, and we meet. Well, we're meeting monthly right now just to ensure that we're getting everything going forward as we need it, because it had been dormant for so long.

So we meet monthly right now with the SVP of operations, so the senior vice president of operations, the senior vice president of maintenance for oil sands, and the director of EH&S, Environmental Health and Safety for Suncor also attends these meetings. So we have the opportunity to address any items that have been outstanding on other joint health and safety committees from all across site. We address those ones and anything that we've had or that I've had particularly, any problems addressing. For example, we had some of our members were the facilities that they had, their locker rooms and their lunchrooms, weren't really up to what we have at Suncor typically, so we tried to address it through the joint health and safety committee. We couldn't really get any traction there, so I brought it up at that central safety committee meeting and it's not quite resolved, but pretty close. The situation is far better than what it was initially.

Q: What are the hazards of working at Suncor? What health and safety problems have arisen?

KC: The problems, the hazards vary all across site, depending really on what area you're in. For example, out in the mine, the biggest hazard is the equipment that we work with. These 400 ton trucks are not small by any means. So, they come with a different set of hazards than say in the upgrader where we have the biggest hazard and concern down there is H2S. Within extraction you have different hazards there as well, so whatever processes that we're using there, the hazards would come from that. They have H2S there,

well they have limited H2S there I guess. There could be the cyclones probably that we're using and how that's working.

Q: What's a cyclone?

KC: The cyclone is like the separator where it separates the bitumen from the mineral and the water. It's like big huge cyclones, I don't know another word.

Q: What's the process? Is it hot water separation?

KC: Yes. The oil sand comes in, it's mixed with hot water, the bitumen separates, the miner, the water all separates. So the bitumen portion is taken and that gets put through the process.

Q: What are the human costs?

KC: Last year, 2014, was a very bad year for Suncor at oil sands, and particularly for our union, for Unifor. We lost three members in workplace fatalities last year in 2014 and we also lost two brother contractors as well, one on our site and one at the *in situ* site, for a total of fatalities in 2014, which really is unheard of throughout our industry. And all within the first six months of 2014. So it was a terrible time.

Q: How did they die?

KC: All five of these instances were completely separate, so nothing linking them together. Our first brother that we lost, Jerry Cooper, on January 19th of last year, 2014, there was a leaking pipe and it caused, so it leaked into the sand and this water was coming out of this pipe very fast and it created a whirlpool underneath the snow. He had fallen into that and drowned. That was the first one. We then had the contractor that passed away out at *in situ*. He was operating a backhoe on some ice, and the backhoe broke through the ice and that individual drowned as well, but nothing still linking the fatalities. Our third one was brother Shane Day on April 20th. Brother day was electrocuted down in our upgrader in a workplace fatality. So then we had, that was our third fatality, our second union brother. Then on May 7th we lost sister Lorna Weefer in a bear attack on our site.

Q: What kind of work was she doing?

KC: She was an instrumentation and electr..., sorry, she worked with E&I, which is electrical and instrumentation. So she was on her way to a wash cart, so bathroom facility located away from her workshop, and on her way back she was attacked by a bear and died. So that was our third member and our fourth fatality. At the beginning of June we lost a contractor, another brother from, excuse me, North American Construction, who was a heavy equipment technician out there. He had the belly pan from a piece of equipment, from a dozer, grader, and the belly pan fell down and crushed him and he

died on site as well. So all of the fatalities, none of them were really related at all, but obviously from workplace hazards and things that weren't identified.

Q: Did any of them indicate a weakness in the safety program?

KC: I think all of them did, just different pieces from each one just showed how we were... A lot of it was, I shouldn't say. A lot of it, some of it did come from that we had incidents in the past that we didn't really address properly. For example, with Jerry's fatality, we had had people in the past that fell into holes created by leaking pipe, but they didn't get reported so then they didn't get addressed, that type of thing. Maybe the way that we approached leaking lines would be different had we addressed those in the past as opposed to leaving them like that.

Q: Did the fatality result in a change of practice?

KC: It did yes. So that fatality, we now have a different procedure for approaching leaking lines. There's a lot more to it. You have to have emergency escape plans in place. The way that we approach it even is different. You have to be back a certain distance, maybe you need to have heavy equipment in there to uncover it prior to going up there. The way that the leaks are flagged or approached I guess is the biggest change for that one.

Q: What about work-related illnesses?

KC: Long-term illnesses. We haven't really had anything reported from our worksite, although obviously it's an old plant so we do have asbestos there. Just recently, well within the past I think it was probably six years, maybe a little bit longer, OH&S changed the levels for silica. So now we have a big huge program that was developed with regards to silica where there's some different protocol and how we have to follow that because of the possibilities of silicosis in the future. So how we handle asbestos, how we handle the silica, we do have bigger more in depth processes involved with that as well.

Q: Is silica something that comes out of the process in the tar sands?

KC: Well the vast majority of the silica that we have on site comes actually from our roads out in the mine. They have these big trucks that loaded they're about 1.5 million pounds, so it's not little dinkies that we're playing with here. So as they're going over the roads they're crushing the sand, and that's what's causing the silica actually.

Q: So what program is in place to address that?

KC: When you start at Suncor you do a baseline testing, which gives you an X-ray and chest functioning and all that stuff. Then it's followed up yearly or every two years with X-rays and chest functioning or lung functioning I guess, pulmonary. So they have a baseline of when you start and then you're monitored each year.

Q: What are they finding?

KC: Right now we haven't had anything. Nothing has shown up for any of our members. But you don't know, this stuff is chronic use, so over a longer period of time who's to say in 30 years or 25 years, whatever the case, of being in that type of environment what kind of damage it could do. So that's why it's important, we always stress the importance with our members of having the baseline testing done.

Q: What happens when your committee identifies an issue that can't be resolved? Or have you run into that situation?

KC: At the joint health and safety committee levels, anything that can't be addressed there, we bring it to the central safety committee. Most times, the things that get brought there are addressed, or if they're not addressed right away, because sometimes it takes time to fix some things, there's a joke that Suncor time is a little bit different, takes longer. But if we've identified issues with regards to HVAC and things like that, they are being worked on. But like I said, sometimes those things take a little bit of time, so we try to be patient.

Q: What recourse is available if things can't be resolved?

KC: If worse came to worse, we always have the refusal to work on the grounds of imminent danger. The process through Suncor, how we have it outlined is very similar to what we are required to do by Occupational Health and Safety. If somebody's asked to do work that they believe is unsafe, they have the right to refuse. They fill out paperwork, give statements, the supervisor then goes to the second group to ask them, explain why the first group turned down the work and why they thought it was unsafe. If the second party agrees with the first party and they still think that the work is unsafe, eventually what happens is an OH&S officer is called and they'll come to site and they'll decide whether it's unsafe work or not.

Q: Have you ever had to resort to taking a case to the fourth level?

KC: We have. Well once since I've been doing this position, we did do that one time. As it turned out, the OH&S officer did decide in favour of the company, that the work we were asked to do was safe. However, they did make a recommendation that we, so it was all about we were lifting a box for a truck - so heavy hauler box. The workers wanted to have wireless remotes for the overhead cranes, but Suncor at that one particular area didn't want to give them the wireless. They said that they could use the pendulum type remotes, which OH&S did say that it was safe and we could do that. But they did recommend that the wireless remotes would be much safer, and a week later our workers did have the wireless remotes to use.

Q: So you won that one.

KC: Essentially.

Q: What sort of training do you give your safety reps? Does the union provide the training or does the company?

KC: Right now, in the past when we were part of CEP, as opposed to before our merger with CAW to form Unifor, all of the safety rep training did come from the company. We still do get the vast majority of our training right now through Suncor, through the company. We do have new, since we've merged, Unifor does have quite a few safety courses that we will be getting our safety reps trained in. You're seeing our new building here, so once the main portion of our union hall is finished we'll be able to do much more training here within our facility. It's easier to bring the people in, a couple of people in to train more as opposed to sending all the reps out. So we will be getting training with regards to instant investigation, just basic health and safety, OH&S, that type of thing. That training will be also done through the union as well.

Q: Was most of your own training onsite training from the company?

KC: A lot of my training has come from the company, but I have done expensive training in a whole bunch of different things throughout the union as well, throughout my career. I've done steward training, I have done some women leadership training through the union as well, so I have a little bit of both or a lot of both I guess on either side.

Q: You mentioned that you were raising a child at the time you were becoming active in the union. What sort of shifts were you working at that time?

KC: When I first came back to work after my maternity leave, I was working six on and six off, so three day shifts, three night shifts, and then six off, 12-hour shifts. It takes a lot of your time. By the time you take the bus to work and then home from work, it's a 14 or 15 hour day. So it's long hours for sure.

Q: It seems impossible.

KC: It is. I actually have had a live-in caregiver, a nanny, ever since I returned to work. In Fort McMurray, childcare is, I don't wanna say next to impossible, but very expensive. For the days when I'm working you have to have childcare. When I first went back to work we didn't have to worry about school and things like that obviously. My son was only a year old. Jayden is now 10 or he'll be 10 I guess in July, so I've had a live-in caregiver ever since. Even after school care, some evenings I have to work late or I have monthly membership meetings, that type of thing, so you need to have some coverage there. It's hard to find just part time, someone to do that part time.

Q: How did you cope. The live-in caregiver made it possible?

KC: Absolutely. When I worked shift work for sure, if I didn't have someone live-in then I would've had to get my son up out of bed. In the winter it's fairly cold here for most of it anyway, like minus 30. To have to take my son out in that wasn't really, I didn't consider

it a very good option. I did work the 6 and 6 right up until probably when I took this position, was elected into this position, I worked the 6 and 6. Now I work straight days, so Monday to Friday, supposedly 8 to 4. Most evenings I'm later than that getting home. But you do it.

Q: Why do the 6 and 6's happen? Why do the 12 hour shifts occur?

KC: It is very hard to work, no doubt.

Q: So why was it instituted and what have people done about it?

KC: The plant runs 12/7 365 days a year, so they have to man all the positions. So that's I'm assuming how all of that started. It came well before my time. The six days off are quite nice, no doubt about it. If you just take one cycle off, so one set of six, that gives you 18 days. That's lots of time for a vacation, that type of thing. So you work hard but you also have an opportunity to have a longer break in between. The days were long but you just get used to it I guess.

Q: So the union hasn't objected to the 6 on 6 off shift pattern?

KC: Well management obviously wants it. The union, we've been working it for years. It's not just 6 and 6, we have a lot of different shifts that we work within our collective agreement. While we do have the vast majority of our members working on the continuous shift, the 6 and 6, we do have others that work a 5 on 4 off, 4 on 5 off, that type of shift. We have other workers that are working what we call a P shift, so they work Monday to Thursday, two 12s two 8s. So it's a lot of different shifts mixed up. But the 6 and 6, it is long hours.

Q: It seems to me it would be particularly hard on women, because of the dual responsibility thing. Did that ever come up with the women's committee?

KC: Well really like I said it's just something that we're used to at that point. I know in the past they have done some work sharing. We had one of our sisters and a brother, they both worked one shift out in our mine, and they did a work sharing. So that was one thing that they did in the past. Now not so much – when you're working you're working. So ya I guess you just get used to it. Like I said, when I went back to work I was a single mom. My son, like I said, now he's 9 and he'll be 10 in July. He plays hockey, he plays ball hockey; he plays baseball. It's busy, but you just adapt. You're right, it is a lot more work for women cuz we do maintain the household as well. You just adapt. I don't know what else to say.

Q: Is it still a male dominated union?

KC: It is absolutely, for sure. The company has tried to start bringing more women into the workforce. They have what they call Women Building Futures program out in the

mine, where they're bringing more women into the workforce. They are trying to increase the numbers but we're still sadly outnumbered by far.

Q: Is the union doing anything about it?

KC: Not so much with our union for sure, our local. We're supportive with women. I'm probably, I think I'm the first woman that's been the safety chairperson in our local. Angela Adams was, I believe, the first woman on our executive for our local. Our local has always been very supportive of the women. We've had a women's committee active before I started and they've always had their place in our bylaws and whatnot. We've always created space for women. We haven't had as good participation within our women's committee as we would like, but we still are able to have a committee. We're still active helping within the community, with Unity House, for example, the women's shelter that we have here in Fort McMurray. We've done quite a bit of fundraising for that.

Q: How were you treated on the worksite when you first started? Did you encounter any discrimination or hear about any?

KC: It's everywhere really, I think. I've never personally had anything to do with that. I've never been harassed or had any dealings with that. To me, I just never had any tolerance for it. If anybody said anything, then I just gave it back to them. I've heard stories; you always hear stories. I heard one supervisor had said that, why do we have women here in our workplace? There's no place for them here. That's so wrong. You address it. I would let the director know in that area that I've heard that comment or I've heard that comment was passed along, and they try to deal with it I guess. But like I said, not for me personally. Maybe it's just people, I don't know, maybe just my personality I guess maybe, I don't know. You might need to cut that.

Q: Does the company or union have any language or policies to deal with that?

KC: We do have harassment policies of course, the company and the union, zero tolerance for harassment. Not to say that we don't have that out there, because we do. As a steward I've dealt with a couple of cases. The results I guess vary. They say zero tolerance but it's not all sexual harassment, sometimes it takes on different forms.

Q: Is the company doing enough to hire aboriginal people?

KC: I haven't really dealt a lot with that. I know that they do have a certain percentage of the workforce has to be native or aboriginal, indigenous. Like I said, I know that they do have to have a certain percentage of their workforce, but to be honest I don't know.

Q: What kind of community is Fort McMurray for women?

KC: I don't spend a lot of time out at the bars and that type of thing, but it's definitely more men than women in this community. There's no doubt about that. Finding your

place I guess, for me it's more I don't think of it as a women thing it's just you have to do it. I'm not sure, it's like you have to create your own space.

Q: Is it a good community for raising children or for women to live in?

KC: I believe it is. We have a lot of organizations throughout the community that are family-oriented. We have a beautiful facility down at Mac Island, which has this big huge swimming pool, two or three pools, a bunch of ice surfaces, some field houses; it is a beautiful facility that's within our community. We have a bunch of other arenas. To me, the schools are pretty good. We have fairly low student teacher ratio I would think, comparatively speaking anyway. I think there's less than 20 people in Jayden's class, so that way I don't think it's bad. I think any city has the same type of things going on, whether it's Edmonton or Calgary or Fort McMurray. There's always a lot of talk about drugs and this and that, but I think it's just what you make of it. Fort McMurray has been my home since 1999. I have a house here and raise my son and work. I have a good paying job. Fort McMurray has been good to me.

Q: So it is your home, and you intend to stay here.

KC: Absolutely.

Q: A lot of people don't.

KC: Yes, lots of people come and they say that they're just going to stay for, they have a limit set. They're going to make so much money and then they're going to go home. To me home is where you make it really. My parents still live back in Newfoundland, my grandmother's back there, a lot of aunts and uncles. My parents spend a lot of time here in Fort McMurray. My sister lives here and her kids. So when we're both here and their grandchildren are here, they spend lots of time here. I forget what the other part of your question was.

Q: You consider it to be a good community?

KC: It is absolutely, I believe that. A lot of the misconception I think comes from when people are staying at camp. We call it our shadow population. Right now it's huge. It's probably actually cut back a little bit since the oil prices have gone down, but with the contractors and stuff, a lot of our members, the vast majority don't stay at camp, with the exception of our members at Firebag. Those guys stay at camp, or those members. But when you're in camp you don't have the opportunity to spend much time within the community. All they see is camp, which is work, eat, go home, go to bed, work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep – that's all they do. Whereas when you're living in the community and participating, you have the opportunity. So today I'll come to work, I go home after work and have supper. Then my son has dry land practice or he has hockey practice, or he has baseball, or he has some function, or sometimes we just stay home and watch TV or sometimes we go together to a movie or to Mac Island or whatever. You're doing something, you're participating. You're out in the community and enjoying the

benefits of it, whereas the people from camp don't do that, then they bring those stories back to wherever they're living or coming from, and they don't even see this side of Fort McMurray.

Q: Is Firebag where they're extracting the oil, right?

KC: Yes. Firebag is *in situ*, which is the sag D. So steam assisted gravity drilling, so that's the latest and greatest from Suncor.

Q: How good is that for the environment?

KC: Well they still need to use water in their process. It doesn't create as big a footprint as what our mine does, but we're still taking the oil from the ground.

Q: Is it creating issues with the underground water?

KC: Although I know how the process works, I'm not exactly familiar with how it affects it. They run two pipes, so one goes in and has steam in it on the bottom and the steam I guess essentially melts the bitumen out of the oil sand, which then flows up through the other pipe. How it affects the sub terrain I'm not really sure. Not all the workers at in situ are our members. The people that are running the plants, the process operators there, are members. Then there's a lot of different contractors up there as well.

Q: Do you have any questions, Don? . . .

Is Firebag in a remote location? Can drive to it? Just keep talking to Winston.

KC: Firebag is just north of our oil sands plant. You can drive there. It's a little over an hour's drive out there. So it's still north on 63 past Suncor oil sands plant. It is fairly isolated up there, although you can drive in and drive out. They do have a fly in fly out system there for the workers, so a camp right onsite. Most of the shifts I believe are like two weeks in and two weeks out, so they do fly in fly out from somewhere. They have B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan I believe that they fly in fly out to.

Q: So family balance there hasn't been an issue?

KC: Well that's it. You fly out to see your family; you fly in for work. So it's completely separate, whereas like I said, here for us, we're more involved within the community.

Q: Do people get paid extra for working in camp?

KC: To be honest, I don't know. I think their wages are probably pretty similar to ours. I know that the people that were driving in and out I believe in the past were getting some additional pay for drive in drive out. But typically our members that worked up there were fly in fly out. It was mostly staff that came in and out on the buses.

Q: So, Great Canadian Oil Sands started in 1967 or something like that?

KC: Yes, '65 or '67, something like that.

Q: How long is it going to keep going?

KC: A long time, I hope.

Q: Are they saying anything? They keep increasing production.

KC: They do for sure, and we do have lease on the other side of the road as well. They were calling that Voyager, and we started to build over there a new upgrader. But there is going to be, part of the mine will be over there as well. They've done one mine at the oil sand site where we are now and they still have quite a bit of the second mine there left to do yet, and then they still have more room on the other lease. There's still quite a bit more work, I think they said like at least another 30 years.

Q: Has the union discussed the pipeline debate?

KC: For Keystone a lot of it is the fact that we need to be able to keep the jobs in Canada. They want to build this pipeline that's going to go right down through the States. So for us that's losing our jobs. The only jobs we're going to have is construction from here down to the American border, and then that's it. Construction jobs are only while they last, so nothing lasting. If we refine it here, whether it's in Alberta or out east and we use the other pipelines, then that I think is our best avenue. Maybe we're not going to have the opportunity to refine it all here in Alberta, but at least we should do it in Canada. That's what I think, that we need to keep the jobs here.

Q: The company doesn't agree with that.

KC: Well no, because they can ship more raw bitumen out and have it refined elsewhere. And they're still selling their bitumen. So it's as broad as it is long, for those guys.

Q: So when they're talking about shipping the bitumen out, they're talking about shipping the product that's already gone through the cyclone?

KC: Yes.

Q: So it'll be that liquid that has a high carbon content.

KC: Yes, that's what we call the raw bitumen, before any upgrading. In our process now we do the synthetic crude, which gets sent down the pipeline - the diesel and whatnot that's made at our facility here. They would skip that portion of it altogether and just send it right from extraction down the pipeline.

Q: So it wouldn't even be going through an upgrader before that?

KC: No.

Q: When you're talking about the lab testing of things, has there been a change over the years you've been working there in the amount or rigor of the testing process?

KC: When I first started at Suncor in the lab, the testing that we did there was, we still did that 24/7. There were two of us on shift, the continuous 6 on 6 off and then we had another six or seven people that were on dayshift. So the E78, which is the 5 and 4 and 4 and 5. Those demands have increased a lot in the past 14 years since I've been there, and we now have four people on the 6 on 6 off, the continuous shift, and we're up to 11 or 12 on the day shift for each one. Of course we've had to increase our members at the lab because our testing has increased, the numbers of testing have increased and we've started doing different testing. They've started to bring some of the testing that we used to send out to contractors, so third party, we've brought some of that back in-house for our members to do in the lab. So ya, the testing has increased considerably in the past 14 years, the variety. The testing methods that we're using mostly stay the same. We do have some new instruments that we're using with the new technology, so when they introduced ultra low sulfur diesel then we had to bring in new instrumentation to test that.

Q: So for people who are worried about the environmental impacts, the testing has become more rigorous?

KC: With regards to that for sure, especially with the ultra low sulfur diesel. Yes, we have increased our testing, so any time that it goes over a certain specification the diesel gets shipped to an off-spec tank. It has to be a certain amount, otherwise you can't sell it.

Q: We were talking earlier about the water, the emissions from the stacks. Has that improved over the years?

KC: The amount of water that we take out of the river has decreased. The environmental specifications as to what we have limits on different testing before we put it back into the river. I'm not sure, I think that they've basically remained the same.

Q: But there's less stuff going into the river.

KC: Absolutely. Not the kind of accidents that we used to hear about. The last one that we had was actually not even from our plant. It was from a pulp and paper in Hinton, where they were calling it a plume, came up the Athabasca River. So any water that we were taking in, all that was shut down until this plume passed us by. You'll hear people say as well that you can see the oil in the water, like the sheen on top of the water. But most of that is natural. You can see it in the summertime that the bitumen is shiny on the riverbanks.

Q: The bitumen is seeping into the river.

KC: Yes for sure.

Q: What about the emissions from the smokestacks?

KC: Very low compared, like I said, to different other industries. Very rarely do we, like I said, exceed any environmental expectations or limits that are set.

Q: Are people getting the wrong message? Is there some sensationalism where it shouldn't be?

KC: I think there is. A lot of it is, I think, blown out of proportion. When they always say, call it tar sands, we call it oil sands. I think there's always a stigmatism that comes with that. I don't think it's as bad as what people make it out to be.

Q: Regarding the shifts – I get the 6 and 6, but it's the flip in the middle – what's the logic to that. Surely there's an impact on the tiredness factor.

KC: Yes, the 6 and 6 of 3 days 3 nights, and we call it a 'short change' when you go from days to nights. To me it would just break up your shift. For me, to work 6 night shifts I don't think I'd be able to do that. Even 6 days shifts is long. To me it was easier to do the days than the nights, like to split them, just because it would give you a break. You would work the 3 day shifts, and then you had a break. You had a chance to sleep in, get some extra rest, and then you'd just work your 3 night shifts. So then your first day off was kind of like I would only sleep for a few hours, get up early, go to bed fairly early that night, and then you're completely reset so your first full day off wasn't a complete waste. I'd sleep until noon so I still had 8 or 9 hours to do whatever I needed to do, then go to bed and get up regular the next day kind of just to reset. But I found, I don't work overtime unless, well we have forced overtime in my area. So we used to work overtime we would say by invitation only, so that was the only overtime that I worked. So when I was forced to work overtime I would find it so much harder to work the more shifts. So the 3 days and then 3 nights was perfect for me, because you had your first day, your middle day, and your last day, and then you had a chance to reset so to speak and then do your nights. It just depends on the individual I guess, personality.

Q: It may or may not be. There's literature on shift work, and surely the company has had some incidents where grogginess would be a factor.

KC: Absolutely.

Q: Truck drivers, for instance.

KC: Oh yes, because you're driving a truck on one shift. You get three 20 minute breaks in a 12 hour period, and it's the same thing as driving basically to Edmonton and back every single shift. It is long and hard. We have certainly had issues with fatigue. I don't know how much to go into this. Lots of times we'll have drivers that'll radio the supervisor and say, hey, I just need to have a little break. Or they delay out for a personal break, however they do that. Absolutely we've had people fall asleep at the wheel. It

hasn't been as much fall asleep at the wheel. We have had some people do that but not as many as you might think. We do have people that might sleep through their breaks, so on their 20 minute break there's an alarm or whatever set on their display panels and they'll close their eyes, probably not meaning to sleep, but doze off and then not hear the panel. We've probably had more of those than we've had people who fall asleep at the wheel, for sure.

Q: What's the importance of the women's committee, and what types of issues does it address?

KC: Within our union we're very lucky that we do have pay equity, so women are paid the same as men. We do have obviously different issues with regards to maternity, paternity...

Q: Just keep talking to Winston.

KC: ... with regards to maternity, paternity, even just bathrooms, just the wash facilities. To me it's important that we have a women's committee because we're fewer in the workplace and we need to be able to support one another regardless of whether it's women's issues or just issues that we have in general, that we're there to help support the sisters within our local and give them an opportunity to help them. Maybe it's not always women's issues that we deal with. It could be safety issues or just any issue, so that they know that they do have support within our local.

Q: What are the demands of the Health and Safety chair, and what happens when there's an incident in the plant?

KC: When there's an incident onsite, the first thing they do is get a safety rep involved. So, one of the 120. Depending on how serious the incident is, if it's a fatality they usually call me. Last year they did call me to let me know what was going on right away. The first fatality investigation we did, I was involved in the three of them last year as the safety chairperson. The first one, I did the entire investigation, myself and another trainer from the area that was familiar with the working procedures and processes and stuff that we use there. So he and I worked on that investigation for the entirety. Then of course we had another one before we were even completely finished the first investigation. When the second one occurred there was another member then that got pulled in along with me as well. In each of the investigations there's a safety rep and myself involved. Like I said, the first one I did the entire investigation, the second one probably 75 percent, and then maybe 50 percent for the third one, just because I'm trying to deal with the other investigations as well. So yes, typically they do get the safety reps involved as soon as we have an incident. We just kind of lend an unbiased or biased opinion, however you look at it, to even it out from the company and the worker's perspective.

Q: So there's always a union person called to investigate?

KC: Typically, yes. Any health and safety ones, the safety reps have been involved in those investigations. The environmental and the economic, typically we don't get involved unless there's a huge health and safety aspect to it as well. For example, we had one incident last year where we lost power to our upgrader, so that was significant economic incident but there was a huge health and safety aspect to it as well because how we evacuated the plants, what happens to the plants when things shut down and our members are still in the plant running the plant or what's left after the power goes down. So that aspect of it we were involved to help out with that portion of it as well. Some of it came through our joint health and safety committee meetings, like with regards to the evacuations, so they were able to get members or the safety reps involved from that aspect of it. I'm not sure I answered your question.

Q: Were you involved in the case around the random drug testing?

KC: Since I started, we have had pre-job alcohol and drug testing, we also have post-incident testing. Our union has spent a lot of money with regards to post incident testing even. So we've done arbitration where the arbitrator has outlined different scenarios where we shouldn't send people for drug and alcohol testing. The company doesn't always follow that arbitration. We try to push them as much obviously as we can to do that.

Q: What did the company do that led to the filing of that grievance?

KC: Any time that there was any incident whatsoever, they were sending people for drug and alcohol testing, regardless. If two members were in a truck driving down the haul road and the transmission fell out of the truck, they would send both of those individuals for drug and alcohol testing. First of all, one is a passenger and really what do they have to do with it? Nothing. So, since 2012, Suncor did try to implement random drug and alcohol testing on our worksite and our union has again spent quite a bit of money fighting that as well. The union never condones the use of drug and alcohol in the workplace. That's not what it's about – it's about privacy. It's about what you do on your days off. The testing that they do at Suncor is the urinalysis, which doesn't test for impairment but just for use. So it doesn't say whether you're impaired when you've had that incident.

Q: So the Labour Relations Board found in favour of the union?

KC: Yes. ... We filed a grievance as soon as they wanted to implement it. When it went to the Board, it was supposed to be an expedited grievance, directly to arbitration. In the meantime, before arbitration started, we had to go to court to get an injunction to stop them right away. Of course they appealed that. We then won the appeal, so the injunction was upheld. We then went to arbitration. I didn't actually get the opportunity to listen to any of the testimony going through because they didn't know if I would be called for a witness or not. So I didn't get the opportunity to do that. I did get to go to the closing arguments of the arbitration, so I did participate, or not participate I guess, but listen to

that. Then after that of course we won the arbitration. Suncor appealed it and it was sent to judicial review, so I did get the opportunity as well to listen to that. It's amazing.

Q: What happened with the judicial review?

KC: We haven't got the judicial review back yet to say whether we continue, or if we have to go back to arbitration again. But it's amazing when you have the opportunity to listen to that stuff, to listen to what the company has to say and how the union responds to that; it's quite interesting. You get a different aspect or view of the company when they do that. I shouldn't have opened this can of worms, obviously.

Q: You get to hear what the company really thinks.

KC: That's right. Some of the things that they say - you know when you hear them every single day talk about how important safety is to them, and when I listened to the company in the judicial review - if they had the opportunity to implement random drug and alcohol testing. it would solve all of our issues. That's what's portrayed there, when really the number of incidents that are due to drug and alcohol use are very limited, very few.

Q: Some people would argue that the company should be able to do it. What's this privacy issue all about anyway?

KC: Well we're Canadian citizens and we have the right to privacy. What we do on our days off is what we do on our days off. Like I said, the union never condones the use of drugs and alcohol in the workplace, that's not where it's supposed to be. It's for your days off to do whatever you're going to do, nothing illegal but... We do want a safe workplace and we want all of our members to go home the same way that they came in every single day. How do I say this? With regards to why are we fight it, like I said, it's our basic human rights.

Q: Highway 63 – what are your feelings about how the government has handled the whole issue?

KC: Obviously Highway 63 they call it the Highway of Death. To me it's our main way in and out of Fort McMurray. We have 881 but nothing like 63. I think that the government should've done more with this a long time ago. It's the main access coming in and out of Fort McMurray. We're isolated here, we're five hours away from Edmonton, which is the next biggest centre. Everything has to be trucked in here. That they're finally twinning the highway, a lot of the accidents that were there were head-on collisions, so many lives lost all the way down through. They talk about well they shouldn't be driving so fast, but they have limits set, it's the passing and so much traffic.

Q: The government ruled out rail right off the bat as a way of moving freight.

KC: I thought they used to have rail here before, I'm not sure. That was before my time.

Q: They tore it up.

KC: I'm not familiar with the railway, but the highway... This is the oil sands, this is where Alberta is making so much of their money from. Why not make those roads as safe as they possibly can to get in and get out?

[END]