

Catherine Canning

March 10, 2015, Fort McMurray Interviewers: Winston Gereluk & Don Bouzek

CC: I am the area safety representative for electronics and I am a journeyman red seal electrician.

Q: Tell us about your background.

CC: I was born in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. I was the youngest of four children. Soon after I was born my mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and so I spent most of my childhood and adolescent years with my father. Every time my mom got sick she would, and I don't know if it's because she got sick right after I was born, but she would become aggressive towards me. Her voices in her head would tell her that I was the devil's child. My dad always protected me, so I spent all my time with him. When my mom did get sick he would send me away to friends of mine places who I would live with until mom would either come out of the hospital or get well enough that social services wasn't still chasing me down. So my dad basically would hide me as a child so I wouldn't get taken away.

Because I spent most of my time with my dad, shortly after my mom was diagnosed he decided to buy a farm out in Annapolis Valley outside of Windsor in Ardoise, Nova Scotia. So I was basically brought up on a farm and I was always given the choice whether I wanted to work in the house or work in the barn, and I always chose the barn. So I spent my youth either cutting wood or working in the woods or working in the barn. Never had a problem cleaning up after the animals. So I was raised differently than my two sisters. I have one older brother as well, so my dad always treated us the same. I was only a year younger than my older brother, and him and I spent all our time together with our dad and my sisters looked after the house. I honestly feel sorry for them because I think I got the better upbringing and definitely the better childhood of the two, because there was a lot of responsibility put on them where there wasn't as much or any put on me. I just got to roam free and do what I wanted to, so it was a different childhood but it was a good childhood. That's made me who I am, so I can't really complain that much. So when I was in high school I didn't know, I would never have thought that I would ever become an electrician. I had my heart set on being a marine biologist actually. I took all the pre science courses – biology, chemistry, physics, advanced math – so I'd be able to take my Bachelors Science and go into Marine Biology, because that's where I figured I would end up. My two sisters went off to university, one to do a business degree and the other sister went into music, so she's a professional flautist I guess. She's very talented and extremely educated when it comes to her degree, and she now teaches flute in the conservatory in Victoria and she's very happily settled there. My other sister is actually now teaching in Halifax and she's very happy there.

Q: Did anything about politics or union seep into your home life?

CC: We weren't a political family but my father worked at the Halifax Shipyards. He was union for part of his life and then he took a supervisory position. He was always very supportive of the workers and he always helped them out whenever possible. So I guess I was never anti union or pro union, it was sort of indifferent in our place. There was no political discussions or anything along those lines at all. Later in life my sister got very political, not within the union side but just in politics. She's a stringent NDP supporter so I guess that always helped out as well. But yes, so shortly after my sisters went off to university and my brother was in grade 12 and I was in grade 11 at the time. My father had broken his neck so he was trying to outdo my brother. We had a pond in our back 40 so they built a diving board and my brother was doing back flips off of it. My father figured that he could do back flips off it as well, and landed on his head. I was on my way down to see where they were because they hadn't come back in a couple hours. I found my brother down there trying to get my dad out of the water still. So we ended up piling him onto the back of a tractor and taking him up top. I was in the back of the wagon holding my dad's neck so it wouldn't move, and my brother was driving the tractor up. We ended up loading him into the minivan and somehow we got him halfway into the Windsor Hospital before we met up with the ambulance.

But after that, dad couldn't really work much, so my dream of going to university fully paid for was sort of out of the question. So my sisters ended up graduating in university and my brother was in his first year actually when I graduated high school. I tried to do my first year university but it was really hard with trying to work at the same time. I use that as an excuse, because lots of people do it, but I was working at a Chinese food restaurant and I was trying to go to university and everything along those lines. At that time my mom was living with me and she was getting sick again. So I met this gentleman and thought I was in love with him, so we got married and we moved to Victoria. So there went my university hopes and dreams and aspirations and everything. So I ended up working in Victoria for I would say we lived there for three years. I was working at the 7-11. His father was working up in the Yukon at the time in a mine up there for Enlo Range Mining. He said if we went up to the Yukon that he would get us jobs up there. So we packed our bags and moved up to the Yukon and I ended up getting a job up there as a heavy equipment operator running trucks and driving them for Enlo Range.

Of course the mine shut down twice when I was up there. The first time we moved to Ontario and we lived in Barry for a while and I worked at Woolco there, then the mine opened back up and we ended up separating and I went back up to Faro to continue working up there. I really loved it up there; it was an amazing place. I think there was only three women working up there at the time that I was there, but coming from a farming environment and everything I was used to working with men and it never bothered me at all and I never had any problems up there. Everybody always treated me great. I don't know if it was because of my personality or just the fact that I just worked with a great bunch of guys and just got lucky. So yes when the mine shut down up there again I started dating my second husband. This is pretty bad for me, but yes, started dating my second husband. He was a second year mechanic at the time so he was coming down to Fort McMurray to go back to school because when you live up in the Yukon the only place to go to school, well the closest place to go to school to do your trades was

Fort McMurray. So he was coming down here at the time so I figured, well why not. I need somewhere to go to start over, because after going through two shutdowns I didn't really want to go through a third.

So we packed up and moved down to Fort McMurray. It turned out I was pregnant at the time, and that was in 1998, so I had my oldest son in 1998 and figured this was a good place to make a start. So I worked at Walmart for a bit because I didn't want to go right back out to the mines when my son was so young. But at six months you realize you can either work for \$9 an hour at Walmart or I could go back out for I believe it was \$25 at the time. So I started working for Clemkey Mining, which is a contractor there working out at Syncrude. I was the only woman working for Clemkey at the time too, operating equipment.

So that was quite the experience because I was always joked around that I was the token female. I really was the only woman that they had working out there, so they had a little segregated bathroom for me. I remember the first time I walked into their space, they only had one entrance and it was right through the male room. So my supervisor at the time didn't think of it. I don't know if he was just testing me, or whatever. So we walk into the dressing room and there were all these half dressed men. One of the guys I remember, and this is something I'll never forget probably because he only had one leg. He had half a wooden leg and he just took his leg off and started waving it at me. It was just the funniest thing. I started laughing because I didn't know what else to do. Here he is in his underwear waving his wooden leg at me and I was just going, oh this is going to be a great place to work, going to be a great place to work. So a couple weeks later I came in and I had my own little bathroom there and they had all of these cute little smelly soaps on the counter with little potpourri on the side. I was just thinking, wow. I just didn't know what to do after that. It was funny. But they always treated me as equal. If I was going slow they'd be calling me on the radio telling me to speed up. There was always a camaraderie and joking around. It was a really fun place to work.

Q: There was none of the sexual harassment we hear about in workplaces?

CC: I have heard about it and I have seen it with other women. There have been a few incidences when I started at Suncor, but I never really experienced it. Again, I'm the type, I'm a direct straightforward type of person. If somebody says something that I don't like or I take offense to, I tell them right away, so that way there's no hard feelings. All the men that I've always worked with have appreciated that about me. I was told when I was working up in the Yukon actually by one of the old guys, because I love working with the older guys because they're just from a different generation and I really enjoy it. I guess I grew up with my dad and I was basically inseparable from him, so I understand them completely.

But I was told by one that they liked working with me and they'd always respect me because I worked like a man but I still acted like a lady. I've always taken that with me. I don't like the swearing and the cursing. I don't try to act like a man, because I'm not a man. I do believe that I have to still do my job better than the men, because in order to be

respected I have to do my job well. If I didn't do my job well I don't think I would get the respect that I actually do. But no, I've never, and when I was at Clemkey there was a lot of hard guys out there, they always treated me with respect. The only one time they used to pick on me a little bit because I worked five days three off, five nights and two off. I did have a six month old baby at the time, so any time it rained I was always the one wanting to go home. So my boss would always let me go home, so some of the other guys would go, oh no you're not going home today. I'm like, but I want to go home today; if you want to work you work, I want to go home. So I used to get a little bit of flak for that, so then I had to stop being the first one to put my hand up and everything.

Q: You have one child or two?

CC: I have two boys now.

Q: How did you handle that work-life balance? At that point were you a single parent?

CC: Well I wasn't married at the time but I was with my significant other, I guess you could say.

Q: But you still had to go home to take care of the children.

CC: That's right, yes.

Q: How did you handle that? What sorts of issues arose there?

CC: Mostly lack of sleep; there was a great deal of lack of sleep. I ended up finding a friend that would look after my oldest when he was young for while I was working. With my husband's shift at the time, there was only probably about six or seven days in the month that we actually needed somebody for a full day. That's one good thing about shift work, you can usually arrange things. We didn't see each other much and that's probably why the marriage ended up going to crappers like it did. But for the two kids it was good because there was almost always a parent home. So on the days that we did have to take them out to childcare it was very early mornings to get them there and then to get to the bus. You work all day then you come home, you go get them again. So it was very tiring and it was very tiring on him. So we ended up actually when he was five years old we ended up getting a nanny because it just made it a lot easier on everybody and on him too, because he didn't have to leave the house anymore at 5 o'clock in the morning. It was easier on me because on my first day off the house would be clean, so I didn't spend the first two days cleaning and trying to reorganize everything. So it did make it easier in the long run. I don't know if it was best for him, because he didn't have to do the things that a normal kid would I guess. The nanny would clean his room so now he's 16 and sometimes he just doesn't think he should do anything. He just lays his cup and I'm always yelling at him going, pick it up, put it in the dishwasher. But I guess that's normal too, because he's 16.

Q: Nobody likes kids at that age.

CC: No and I don't like him a lot much. Right now he's been trying my patience a lot.

Q: So back to working for the contractor, what happened next in your employment history?

CC: I only worked at Clemkey for about eight months. The shift was really starting to get to me. It was long and I didn't get very many days off, especially going from the five days and then three off to five nights and two off. I was tired a lot of the time. I figured if I was going to work shift work I might as well apply at Suncor. So I applied at Suncor when I was at Clemkey for about six months, and I got hired right away at Suncor, being a woman with experience at the start of their hiring spree. I didn't have my application in very long when I got called for my interview. It was funny because I walked into the interview and there was me with 12 men sitting around the table. It's always very intimidating for interviews anyway. I've always thought I should put my worst foot forward I guess and if they don't like me then that's okay but at least you know what you're getting when I would get hired on. So I walked out of the interview thinking, okay there's no way I'm getting that job. That afternoon I got a call saying that I could come out and start on Monday. So I started at Suncor in 1999 and I've been here ever since.

Q: Doing what?

CC: As a heavy equipment operator. So I worked as a heavy equipment operator. I drove their cat 797s, their Komatsus. I ran the 793 trucks. I also got experience on dozers and loaders and graders and backhoe. I ran everything except for shovel; I could never bring myself to do the training for that because I couldn't see myself staring at a bank for 12 hours a day. I like moving around a lot and I get bored kind of easily. I always have to be trying to be doing something. So I never took the training for shovel because I didn't think I would like it. So I did their pit utility, which is moving the shovels, trailing cables around and adjusting the cable stands for the trucks to go under. They didn't want to train me for utility because I was a woman and at the time no woman every did the job before me. So the trainers, I went in one day and again I was getting bored with running equipment and I wanted to do utility because it looked interesting and you're always out doing something physical. Growing up on a farm, I didn't like sitting all day, so I wanted to do that job. So I went in and talked to the trainers and the told me when I could put two of the big water jugs that you put in water coolers, he said the day that I could bring in the two water coolers and put them on their desk, they would start training me. So I went out in the hallway, I grabbed two water jugs and I put them on the desk. I said, okay you can start training me. So the next day they started training me. They didn't think I was strong enough to do the job.

Q: You essentially started an apprenticeship program to become an electrician?

CC: No, that was just for the put utility job. It was in the mine still. So in 2005 after working in the mine for eight years doing everything, running equipment and doing utility and upgrading into the dispatch, I found out I was pregnant with my second child.

So after taking my year off I didn't really want to go back to the mine, I wanted to try something new. At that time they were releasing apprenticeships, so I had a choice between I think there was five different apprenticeships at the time. I chose the electrical apprenticeship because it's something that I always thought was interesting. I always did a little bit on the side anyway on the farm; you look after your own stuff and basically become a Jack of all trades. So I figured if I ever didn't want to stay in Fort McMurray again, electrician travels very well and it's something that they're always going to need electricians for doing house wiring or everything else. So I applied for the apprenticeship program and I believe it was January 2007 that I got accepted into the program and signed my blue book. So I did the four year apprenticeship program through Suncor, which was absolutely amazing because with Suncor when you take on an internal apprenticeship they pay your wages while you're going to school. They pay for your books and they're the ones who are putting you through your apprenticeship and they look after everything within the apprenticeship. So it was great that way. I got to go to all the different areas onsite. I got to work with a lot of great journeymen that I got a lot of experience from, a lot of their knowledge. It was just a great experience for me, especially getting to change areas every year. You get to see all the plant sites and I really enjoyed it. Then I ended up staying then in the upgrader and that's where I've been ever since.

Q: Were you the only woman taking apprenticeship for electrician at that time?

CC: At that time I believe there was two women electricians on Suncor site. One of them is still in my shop now, Penny Whitman. She's a fountain of experience and knowledge; I really enjoy working with her. And there was Sharon, I can't remember her last name, but she worked in extraction. Oh and Natalie, so there was three women, three women electricians on Suncor site when I took my apprenticeship.

Q: You didn't experience any problems with any discrimination against you as a female electrician?

CC: I did when I went to the mine as an apprentice, that would have been my second year, they paired me up with this older gentleman. His name's Frank; I won't put his last name in there. He gave me a lot of grief actually when I first started. He didn't want to train anymore. He only had two years to retirement and he kept saying that he didn't want an apprentice. So I went up to him one day and again I'm not going to run to a supervisor if I have a problem with one of the guys on the floor. I don't think that works, and that would've made me a target. So I just pulled him aside one day and I said, look old man, I said, I'm not your regular apprentice, I'm an old woman. I was 37 when I went into the apprenticeship program; I knew how things worked. I said, you can either train me or not train me. I said, but I prefer you train me, because I'm not going to sit in this shop all day while you're out working, so I'm going to track you down. So he just started laughing and after that he was great. We still keep in contact; he's on my Facebook account and we still send emails back and forth. If I'd gone in and complained to a supervisor that they weren't being nice to me, that would've followed me. It would've followed me and then nobody would've wanted to work with me. I always found it's better just to go face to face with

the person, talk to them. That's always worked out for me. There was a couple times where I went into the lunchroom and the guys were saying something totally inappropriate about women. I was the only woman in the shop, they didn't know I was there. You have to let some of that stuff go. But a couple of times when I did hear it I called them out on it, made a joke about it, had a laugh about it, and then everything was good after that. They knew they could work with me, they knew I wasn't going to run back, and they knew I wasn't going to cause problems. So then after that you get a little bit more respect and they start respecting you and they'll work with you more.

Q: Well you are running into some of the entrenched ideas that men are raised with.

CC: Absolutely.

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

CC: When I started out in the mine Angela Adams - I don't know if you know Angela - she was always trying to get me involved. I always fought back a little bit because my son was so young and I was so busy I didn't feel I could take on anything more at the time. It always seemed that it was for travel. They wanted me to do the women's committee and that would've required some traveling. I didn't want to leave my child at the time, so I always pushed back a little bit. About two years later she asked me to start being one of the safety reps for the mine. I'm like, oh well I can do that because that's just my days working. If anybody needs anything I can help out along those lines. So that's where it started; it started with Angela pushing me to become involved. So over the years I ended up giving up the safety rep for a while, taking it back up, moving areas again. When I actually got my journeyman's ticket, because they were asking me through my apprenticeship if I would be a safety rep as well. I didn't think I knew enough then because I was still learning my trade, I was still learning the areas. I didn't want to take on a job and try to be doing that and still learning my trade. So for those four years I sort of stepped back from it. Then when I finally got my journeyman's ticket and became more comfortable with my job, I took up the safety rep position again just for my shop. That didn't last for very long before they were pushing me to do the area rep for all of electronics. They told me since I worked all over the site, I knew all the areas, I knew all the guys, I'd be able to go everywhere and know somebody. So I was kind of always pushed into it a little bit. I don't know if I would've done it on my own, because it is a lot of work and it's a lot of thankless work. Everybody's lives are always so busy. Honestly I think if it hadn't been for Angela I probably never would've gotten involved. But I saw what she did and how much she put out of her own time, and I always gave her a lot of respect.

Q: What sort of training was required to become a safety rep?

CC: They just threw me right in there. It was a lot of hands on training. Suncor always had its own training but I never really got a lot of the union training. So that was just because, so I didn't really learn a lot about the union from doing the safety rep job; it always seemed to be Suncor led. So I got a lot of my union training just from talking to

Angela and talking to the stewards like Bernie Gillis. He was always correcting me because, god love him, he's a strong union steward. If I ever stepped outa line from the safety aspect into where he thought I shouldn't be going, he let me know right away. So from that Bernie was always trying to get me more involved in the union as well because where I was the safety rep that was in his shop. So any time anything else came up he was always putting my name forward to help out within the union. Also I got involved with the women's committee, so I'm a member of that as well. I was always involved with the union on other aspects as well.

Q: What are the major hazards that you encounter as a safety rep?

CC: Even though I'm an electrician a lot of our major hazards comes from the process, just from working in the plant: H2S leaks, sulfur leaks, valves failing, bitumen spills. That's where I think our main concern is. You always get the electrical hazards. We protect ourselves from those by wearing the R flash rated gloves, the face shields. We have category 4 arc suits, which look the same as when people are disposing of bombs. You get the big pants, the big jacket, the full hood that goes over your head with the fan on so it doesn't get too hot in there. You actually look like the man from the moon when you're going in to do any work on the switch gear, because then you have the big gloves on as well to protect you from shock and from arc from your hands, and then the full suit. So yes we look pretty funny sometimes when we're going to work. So we have a lot of standards. We stick to our procedures when we're doing switching. Everything is a set procedure so it's very safe and it's very stringent where we work. There are accidents that happen. We did lose one of our co-workers last year through electrocution. He died on the job. I ended up working on the investigation for that, and I still have nightmares about it. He was in a spot where he shouldn't have been and we still don't know even after going through the investigation why he was where he was. They ended up, he was in the back of a piece of equipment, a VFD, variable frequency drive, when they were doing testing on it. They energized the test and he was in the back. I still have problems with that one.

Q: So it wasn't a case of the company being at fault at all?

CC: There were many holes; it goes to the Swiss cheese model. There's so many things that failed that day and that failed him that day, that you couldn't blame it on one thing or one person. I don't know, it's very hard. I would never have energized if I didn't know where everybody was, but everybody was looking at the test equipment and he left the area that he was working in or where he should've been, where they assumed he was. So many things failed. There was also erosion of our procedures or lack of procedures. It was just one thing failed, another thing failed, another thing failed. Any one of them could've stopped him from being where he was, but everything just lined up that day.

Q: What's the standard investigative procedure when there's an incident?

CC: They actually brought in an outside investigator because it was a fatality. There were 10 of us on the investigation team: myself, because I was the area rep in the area and I knew the equipment and I knew our procedures and how we do things; Kim

Conway, our safety chair was involved as well and sat in on the investigation; plus they had three specialists, engineers; as well as there was two investigators. So it was very stringent. We went through everything. They involved me with the whole investigation so I was privy to everything. I'm sure Suncor wanted to make sure that everybody knew it was on the up and up and the union was involved. It was interesting. It was the first time I'd ever experienced anything like it, and I hope it's the last time honestly.

Q: What's the recourse when the union doesn't agree with management on a safety issue?

CC: Normally we go through the collective agreement. I can go up so high in my chain of command. I'll start with the supervisor, superintendent, manager, and then I'll go to his boss. If I can't get any headway on what I think would be better for our area, then I'll call Kim, our safety chair for the union and the executive, and then the executive will bring it up higher.

Q: Have you ever had to utilize the section of the act that allows you to refuse to work because of imminent danger?

CC: I haven't. The whole entire time I've been in the upgrading in the electrical department we've only used it once actually. We can usually work things out in our area. I find it very good. Especially since we are electricians, there's a stringent set of rules that says we can and cannot work on it, what gear we need. We have tables and charts and electrical standards that we have to follow. We have liable energized work permits that we have to fill out with all the hazards listed. If there is a hazard listed we either have to put how we're mitigating it or eliminating it. If it goes down to a refusal to work then it's never been on the electrical side. We only had one on the instrumentation side. I work on instrument as well. That was because they were climbing up to the top of the coker structure and one of the ladders was iffy. So I don't know if you've been out to site or seen it, but we're talking 350 feet up in the air. If something's not quite right it gets shut down pretty fast.

Q: Why did the union start a women's committee?

CC: I always had problems with that because, like I said, I've never really encountered a lot of the harassment or discrimination. When I was in the mine it was a little bit different. It was an old boy's club but I always seemed to find my way through it and work through it. I know a lot of the women aren't as vocal as I am and a lot of people get more intimidated. So if you get intimidated and you're not as vocal, then you seem to get walked on a lot more.

Q: Are there any issues from the company's side or from the union's side that the women's committee has to address?

CC: When I was in the mine the reason I got involved with it was because of the bathrooms out there. When I was up in the Yukon we didn't have bathrooms, so I always felt quite spoiled when I came down here and there were actually car washes. But there

was only one. As more women started coming on and getting hired, I was used to going in between the tires on the truck and I didn't have a problem with it. I grew up on a farm and it's just, we had an outhouse until I was 11 years old. It's not something that ever bothered me. But you have to respect the fact that other people coming onsite didn't have the same background as I did, didn't have the same experiences, and they had real trouble with it, they really did. They wanted a washroom. I can't say no just because I'm okay with it or was okay with it. I don't think I'm okay with it now, so I like having my washrooms. But when I first started out there they didn't have the facilities out there for women. Or they had one washroom and it was joint. A lot of women aren't comfortable sharing a bathroom. That doesn't make it wrong. So you have to help them out to make them more comfortable at work. The ones that didn't speak up or were scared to cause a stir or tried to speak and were shut down, you have to help them find their voice as well. If they're scared to speak then I always felt there was a need to speak for them.

Q: Has the union addressed the way it does business in a way to include women?

CC: When I first started I did have my six month old and I told them in my interview that my family would always come first, my kid would always come first. They hired me, so that's why I always thought that even to this day I'm surprised they did. At the time, it was frowned upon for women to be working, because of their kids. They always thought that women would need more time off, or even mat leave if you're young. We have one lady apprentice on the instrumentation side who's been in her apprentice for eight years because she's had three children during her apprenticeship. But she was young, she got the apprenticeship, and god love her, she'll have her journeyman's ticket next week. So it was a long hard battle for her. Eight years and three kids later and she's finally got her journeyman's ticket. She's proud of it and I'm proud of her for it. It's hard and there's a lot of stigma attached to it. People make fun of her constantly because she's the longest running apprenticeship in Suncor history. But she's done it. She's there now and I think that's amazing. But having said that, Suncor is less than ten percent women. I think we're only at seven percent right now, and in the trades I think we're at four percent. So there is a lack of, I don't know if it's a lack of hiring or they just don't feel that women can still do the job, or if the women just aren't applying. I'm not sure what it is because I'm not involved on that side of it. But there is definite lack of women at Suncor site.

Q: Is Fort McMurray a good community for women? Is that what the women's committee should be addressing?

CC: I think that we should start addressing that, and we have had some discussions about helping out the Unity houses. We do the fundraising for Unity House now; that's something that Vicky has started. She's an amazing woman in herself. She's running the women's committee now and she's taken hold of it and started to run with it. I think that's great. There was a question about when Kim, because Kim Conway used to be in charge of the women's committee. She was really busy and she didn't want to do it anymore. We were at one meeting and Vicky was telling me I should do it and I'm like, "no no." I've got two kids still, I said, you do it. So we were fighting back and forth and I think the better person actually took control of it, because she's been doing an amazing job.

Q: What's Unity House?

CC: Unity House is the women's' shelter in town. They're having trouble having enough beds there at the moment, so there is still a domestic violence problem in town. They only have a small shelter at the moment. They're opening up a bigger shelter, so we've been supporting fundraising to get them more beds so they can help out more women.

Q: Is there any link between the domestic violence and the kind of community that Fort McMurray is? It's quite a male-strong community.

CC: It is, and I've heard a lot of the times that women get a job at Suncor and then they end up leaving their husbands or it causes deterioration of the marriage or it enables cheating or makes it easier. But I don't think that's what it is at all, honestly. Having come from my first marriage was abusive and I left. My second marriage wasn't abusive at all, it was more along the lines of neglect. But that was to the point, I don't blame that on my job, I blame that on the two of us putting our kids before each other. We always had time for the children, we never had time for each other. It sort of just grew apart, and there was other issues there as well. But I honestly think that when women get hired at Suncor and they start making their own money, they're using that as a means to escape, as a means to leave a bad marriage. It's not because of the fact that the marriage was great, they start working and all of a sudden it deteriorates. It was probably always bad, and they went back to the workforce so they have a means to leave instead of being trapped. I've always believed that.

Q: What other issues are being addressed by the women's committee?

CC: Right now it's just more of an area where we can go and discuss. Like I said, Vicky is starting to branch out more into the community and onsite, and she's doing a great job. But it takes time to get to know the people in the community and make those connections. We're trying to bring more women from the mine, because we only have one woman that comes to our meetings from the mine. I think a lot of women still see it as a stigma attached to it – they don't want to be part of the women's group because then they're going that they can't work in a man's world if they're part of a women's group. I think that's something that we have to work on and go, that's not the case. We're just here for support, if there is any issues, that we can help fix it for other women. If there is strong women out there those are the ones that you want to bring in because they will help the other ones.

Q: What's your opinion of the environmental issues?

CC: Because I've been here for 16 years and I've made my home here, I've had both my kids here and I've been raising them here, I have no intention of leaving. I try to make it a better place and not a more negative place. I'm not saying that Suncor is the healthiest place to work; I know the difference of that. But we're trying to make strides. Every time we find something that is cause for concern, a health concern or an environmental

concern, we're fixing it right away. I know because our instrumentation group works with the analyzer analyzing what's going into the water, analyzing what's going into the air. It's very stringent. If they are out even .5 they have to call the government and put in reports. They are very stringent with their analyzing. I know there was concern about what our guys were breathing in there a while ago, and you do have a couple of them going, we work in a gas plant, we don't work in a cookie factory. I had one guy the other day telling me that you could basically write off five years of your life by working out here, and that's what you're supposed to do because you're taking on that risk. I'm like no, that's not right. I said, when we find there's a health hazard we're obligated to change that or to fix it. Twenty years ago, because my father ended up dying of asbestosis. He worked in the Halifax shipyards, but at that time they didn't know there was a hazard for asbestos. Now they do. They would never put a person in that position anymore. Now if we know something is a health hazard we can't put that person in that position anymore, because of what may happen down the road. So it's our obligation to have these checks and balances in place.

Q: We keep hearing that environmental considerations have improved over the years? Has that been your experience?

CC: I can say that I honestly believe that they're a lot more stringent in the reporting and making sure that there is no environmental or health issues coming out of the plant. They have to. It's not because it's something that, they may not want to do it but they have to do it. There are regulations in place, and they can no longer, if it's a cloudy day there's dark smoke coming out because they can hide it better. They can't hide it, because it goes into the analyzers. Everything, you can't get past the analyzers. So even though people think that's what they're doing, from our department and since we do look after it, I can say that's not what they're doing. So there is a lot of stigma attached to it. There's always people that just want to point out all the negatives.

Q: What about the safety on the roads. A lot of people are dying on Highway 63, etc.

CC: I don't think the Alberta government puts enough money into the roads up here. I don't think they give us the support. They want the money out and they want it flowing to Edmonton and flowing to Calgary, but they don't want anything flowing up here. I think they're taking way too long on twinning 63. It breaks my heart every time I lose another friend. I've lost, in the last five years I've lost 10 friends on that highway. I don't know, because I do know a lot of people, but still I've lost a lot of people. I've gone to way too many funerals up here. But having said that, do I think twinning it is going to cure everything? Absolutely not. There's a lot of bad drivers up here. Even the last time I went to Edmonton we were driving up and same thing, we were going up a hill, somebody went to pass us and there was a truck cresting the hill. We ended up hitting the side of the road, it was just lucky we didn't hit the ditch. It happens way too often. Until people change their driving behaviors there's still going to be accidents because there's still going to be people passing at 140 even if the road's twinned. But having said that, it'll be more single car accidents and not taking out families of five.

Q: Why do people here keep on supporting the current government?

CC: That still boggles my mind. It's always overwhelmingly – Tory! and nobody seems to want to change their beliefs. I think a lot of it is they're brainwashed to think that if they vote anything else they're going to shut the oil sands down. But we're not going anywhere. That's what I hear a lot, that if we vote for Liberals or NDP they're going to slow the growth down up here or they're going to close the oil sands. We're not going anywhere, but I don't know why people still believe that. I believe that's where a lot of it comes from and stems from. But a lot of it also is that nobody votes.

Q: Is the voting turnout lower here than elsewhere?

CC: Extremely low, even though we get time off work to come in and everything along those lines. A lot of people don't take advantage of it, and they just don't vote.

Q: Could it be that many of them don't intend to stay here anyway?

CC: A lot of that I do find. People are on a five year plan. I hear that so often. Even when I came down here, honestly, all my family was back east at the time and I always thought that I would go back. But after I was here for five years it's like there's nowhere else I'd rather be. I love this community.

Q: Don, did you have anything? . . . Just a couple of things. Could you comment on the cost of living up here?

CC: I am right now a single mom with two boys. I have my own mortgage. I do find, I really do. When I go visit my sister in Victoria it scares me the cost of their fruit and their vegetables and their milk, because they pay more than I do for that. I know we pay more for gas but when I go home to visit my sister in Nova Scotia they always pay more for gas even though their grocery bills are a little bit lower. I know for certain that I make more than my sister and her husband combined, so I can basically, I think it all works out in the end. I do think eating out would be one of the major cost factors, and that's something that I don't do very often because it is a luxury and it's something that I can't personally afford, especially being the only income. So I think there's give and take. I drive an older car because I can't afford an \$80,000 vehicle because the payments are extremely high. My mortgage payment is high, I'm not going to say that it's not, but it's still within my budget and within my range for what I make at work. So if you don't take in all the luxuries that a lot of people take for granted up here, then I think the cost of living is still within range from other areas.

Q: There seems to be consumer madness in this area.

CC: Yes, and the skidoos and the quads. That's what happens. I've seen it a lot over the years, especially when somebody first comes up here and they start making a good wage. I do make a good wage, I make \$62 an hour. I never thought in my entire life that I would make that much. Sixteen years ago when I was working at Walmart I was making \$9 an

hour working the night shift stocking shelves just so I didn't have to come out onsite yet when my son was so young. Then you have to look at it going, this is crazy, why am I not going to work for more and having a little more security? But even then I believe when I started at Suncor I was making \$32 an hour, so in 15 years I've gone up \$30. So inflation doesn't end. With the cost of rent it does cost more for businesses to run up here. Without a doubt it costs more. We even pay an extra 20 cents for a cup of coffee at Tim Horton's than anywhere else. But they have to pay their employees more and their rent is more and they have to recoup the costs I guess. There's never a short line at Tim Horton's, it's still lined up the door and out the road and everything. So people are still buying. But I do, I find that I have to eat out less and it is a treat when I go out to eat out. I think that is where the major costs come in, is entertainment. So you just find other ways to entertain yourself.

Q: What's your experience with the school system?

CC: It's been different for both children actually. My oldest, he had relatively smaller class sizes than my youngest does. I think there's 28 kids in my youngest one's class this year, and he's in grade 4. But next year they added a piece onto the school so it'll be smaller next year. So it goes in cycles I guess. The education system up here I find amazing. Maybe it's because I came from rural Nova Scotia where we didn't have all the extracurricular activities and the extra classes, but the opportunity for the kids up here is absolutely amazing, especially if they want to go into the trades. That would be my only complaint about the school system up here, is that it's basically, where before it used to direct the kids to go to university and broaden their horizons with post secondary schooling, up here they are fast tracking the kids into the trades. I don't know if I agree with that. I'm in the trades myself and I'd be proud if my son went into the trades. I think it would be a good career for him but I don't believe that they should be fast tracking the kids at a young age and saying that this is the way to go and this is what you need, so only take this math, only take these courses and you can be making \$60 an hour when you come out in grade 12. That really, if there's one thing that bothers me up here, that would be it. But with all the other extracurricular activities and all the opportunities for the kids, it's absolutely amazing. They experience so much more. I didn't even know what was out there when I was in high school in grade 12. They have chances to try so many different careers and courses. It really is amazing.

Q: So it's a good school system.

CC: I believe so.

Q: Do you know if the percentage of women in places other than Suncor is relatively similar?

CC: I should clarify I guess. For the clerical it's mostly women. On the Suncor management side they do have a lot of women, but they're always less paying jobs I guess. For upper management and senior management, very few women. For middle management, very few. For the clerical jobs there's a lot of women working out there. I'm

involved with the Alberta Trades and I go down for their skills competitions every year. When I do the Girls Engaged in Trades group, there's quite a few women journeymen that come in to mentor the girls. But unfortunately there's not as many as there should be, so our numbers are still low right across the sites for trades working and for equipment operating. It's still very low, and that goes right across from the Syncrudes and Albiens.

Q: Anything else you'd like to talk about? Did we get the essential Catherine Canning?

CC: I think so. I don't want to sound too crazy.

[END]