

Lori McDaniel

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Interviewer: Winston Gereluk & Don Bouzek Camera: Don Bouzek

LM: I am a heavy equipment operator at Suncor Energy in Fort McMurray, union Unifor 707A. I'm the elected health and safety representative for my crew of 300 people. I also have a political action committee that I started through my local, that I'm co-chair of.

Q: Tell us about your background.

LM: I was born and raised in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. I came from, one side of my family was very political. An uncle of mine was a councilor for 20 odd years in my county. My grandmother was a force to be reckoned with. At the time, the Maritimes were completely Liberal, in the late '70s and '80s. There was no choice of talking about anything else but the red, that was it. I've been in many country kitchen settings of talking about politics and how it works, and supporting parties and that sort of thing. I ended up, my parents were divorced so I ended up not so much in the limelight of that every day at supper talking about politics, but I was intrigued by it. Every time I'd go to the farmhouse I just loved these conversations that were going on. It very much was a part of me. I think I was ten years old, I was signed up as a young Liberal of Inverness County, South Cape Breton, very young. Just always, my father worked at a pulp and paper mill in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia Cape Breton for 37 years, which was CEP at the time. I got a lot of knowledge from him coming home from work while I was still living with him and after that about the struggles for the worker.

Then on my own when I started working, I started working at 14 years old in the hospitality industry of course, on Cape Breton Island not much opportunity. At 14 I didn't have to work but I wanted to work, so I started in restaurants from dishwashing to assistant cook to waitressing to bartending, anything you could do in hospitality dealing with the public. I also started to realize what it was like to have long workdays, no breaks, working seasonal, not having much on the off season to be able to survive. So I ended up after, when I graduated high school I went to Halifax as my first time away from home. I took a legal secretary course at a business college in high school, because I love law, although there wasn't much opportunity. My town was 2,000 people; we didn't have a lot of curriculum other than the basics. We did have a law course when I was in grade 11, and I just loved it, I was right into it. So I did that and I worked for lawyers for a few years. Then I moved back to Cape Breton from Halifax, and obviously there wasn't much for legal work in my town. I did a little bit, but back into the hospitality industry, which is the norm. Then started moving from there, I lived in Boston, Toronto, pretty much all over the country always chasing work and whatever I could do. I went back to school again and ended up taking. . .

So always chasing work basically was my life, and most people from the east coast and unfortunately most people in Canada now. I grew up that way, I know exactly what people are going through. It's not nice. But I got to see the whole country and do all kinds of different jobs and that sort of thing, so it's a benefit. I was gradually moving west across the country, whatever work I could do. Then I went back to school and I took a cooking course, where I'm a certified cook. Now I can do even more, and when I go to a small town or a big city I can get a job right now, and actually I have papers to do it. So then through time I started to think, well what do I really want to do? The hospitality industry is a tough industry, very tough to work in. I love it. Either you love it or you don't. It's very tough, though. It's hard on your body, it's depending work obviously. Like I say, long hours, low pay, no benefits, no pension. There's a lot of downsides to it. So I ended up, I'm a huge animal lover so at one point I decided I would try to find some kind of training session where I could do something with dogs.

I ended up in Guelph, I found a woman in Kitchener that offered this dog training session or course that was totally hands off, all clicker training and hand signals. So I did that for a few years in southern Ontario while I worked on the side at restaurants to maintain my being able to go for the course. Then just back and forth, back to Cape Breton, back to go try another job somewhere else, and never really any stability, no pension building up. What am I going to do? So I ended up in a small mining town in northern Ontario. It's underground mining, and there was logging industry as well. Very small town, isolated town. This contractor had come in to reclaim an old tailings pond from a mine that had been shut down for years. They needed workers, a lot of workers right now. There weren't many that were available. There was actually a worker shortage there because everybody had good jobs in the underground mine, and the logging industry was really strong at the time. So of course at the time I was bartending and I knew who owned the company that was looking for people. So I ended up finding him in town one day and I said, well I hear you're looking for people to work for you. He says, yes, but I'm looking for heavy equipment operators. Being from Cape Breton I said, well I can run heavy equipment. He said, well what can you do? I said, well I can drive a truck, I can run a tractor, I run machinery, I know how to. Why can't I do it? He sort of snickered and said, well you come out tomorrow morning, be at the mine at 7 a.m. He said, you need work boots, we'll give you everything else, and if you can drive a truck you're hired. So I went out, knew nothing.

The job was in full swing. I was new, and a girl coming to this jobsite. I drove up and he threw me on this 13 speed Mac dump truck and let me go. I had a buddy that was in the passenger's seat with me, and drove it. By the end of the day he came to me, which was a ten hour day, and called me down off the truck stern as could be. Lori, come down and see me. I thought for sure I'm not going to be here tomorrow. He took me in his pickup and he said, so we start at 7 a.m. sharp but we'd really like you to be here at 6:45. So we had a little talk before. It wasn't a big like hi, welcome, you really did a good job today or anything. It was just like I was one of the, you're in, and that was it. So that's how I started in heavy equipment. So I ended up driving dump truck reclaiming a tailings pond. Didn't even have a clue what a tailings pond was. Now I look back on it and I'm like, wow - we were down in the bowels of hell of this old tailings pond that was seeping into

the earth for god knows how long, just eating your lunch down in there. No idea just how toxic that was, just happy to have a job, and a good paying job compared to what I had ever had before. Even though it was only for a contract for so long, it was just... And I was operating heavy equipment – it was just awesome.

So I did that for a few months with him until the contract was over, then he told me I'd have a job with him for life, whenever I want, wherever I am, but he can't guarantee fulltime. You're only going to do seasonal jobs here and there. If you're available when we start our next job, you call me whenever you're in. So that was, yeah - so I went from there, ended up getting a job with the municipality in that small town. I did everything from dump truck, or garbage truck, tossing garbage in the back of the truck to I ran the airport, the municipal airport. It was only medivacs and small planes or firefighters that would come in the summer. I fueled the planes, I cleaned the runway, I ran all the machinery to do the whole thing and looked after the airport itself. Just me, there was nobody else. But in town I did grader snowfall at night, you'd get out there and grade the roads and sand them and backhoe. I got so much unbelievable equipment experience on that job it was amazing. That job was unionized; my first exposure to the union of being a unionized employee was that job.

Q: Which union was it?

LM: That was CUPE union in Northern Ontario. So I got some exposure there of, “Oh you mean I don't have to work 12 hours, I get time and a half after eight hours, I get vacation? I get what? I get benefits?”

I didn't know when they hired me that I had all this stuff, and now I'm learning that I'm like, holy, I've gone most of my life without any of this and didn't realize. And wow, this is because people negotiated this before I came along, that I'm getting the benefit. Wow, this is something else. So I ended up, I was hired as a part time municipal worker which now I realized of course they want part time people because they get less benefits than the fulltime. So in the meantime about a year later I ended up going back to work for that contractor who had originally told me come whenever you want, come with me. So one day I was just fed up with the municipal work and I was still working for them but I called my old boss who gave me my first break and said, what are you guys up to, where are you at? He said, we're going to Winnipeg in a couple of months to work on the Red River floodway. It was after the big floods in the mid 2000s, and if you want, you're in. So I said, okay. So I went back to the municipality and told them, I'm leaving, I'm going out.

So I went to Winnipeg. I worked there, expanded the floodway, then ended up back in that mining town, up-graded myself. I got all my tickets and licenses and stuff on my own time when I'd be laid off. I ended up getting my bus driver's license, school bus and every license you can have except for tractor-trailer, which I didn't want. I passed the test but I didn't want to physically drive them once I tried them, and I just abandoned that. So I have every other licensee except for that and motorcycle, which I don't want either. I ended up one night when I was driving school bus in this little tiny town, and I bought a

house in that town, and I decided to apply for Suncor in Fort McMurray online. They called me four hours later. I certainly didn't expect a call. I really wasn't even looking to go anywhere, I was doing well where I was. I had a house. I was fine.

This woman says to me - and this is before the crash of '08, this is February of '08 and Fort McMurray's booming - they can't find enough workers let alone a female who already has experience and tickets. So this woman says to me, well you applied online and now we see your application and we want to know why you're not out here already. My first response was, well because I don't have to be. I really didn't think they were going to call me either. So she said, well we want you to come out and have a look and interview and blah blah blah. I said, well I'm working, I can't just up and leave; this is a shock, I don't even know what to say to you. She said, well tell us when you can come out. Go talk to your employer. We'll fly you out.

Spend a few days in Fort McMurray, feel it out. I said, well I'm a single woman, I hear horror stories about Fort McMurray. I'm pretty tough but if I don't have to go out there, which I don't, I don't know if I will. So she said, come and look, it's not that bad. So they flew me out, took a couple of weeks off work and went out there and toured the oil sands and interviewed and tested and all the hoops you have to jump through. They offered me a job on the spot with all kinds of benefits and stuff that I didn't realize at the time were all because the union had negotiated. I didn't realize it was a union job, either. Anyway, I took the job in '08, so I've been at Suncor ever since operating heavy equipment. The first two years strictly operating heavy equipment, had a very significant incident on a heavy hauler. The 797s are the biggest trucks in the world. It went on fire on me, I ended up injured. Went through the system, the company was really not my friend and the union was.

Q: Talk about that incident.

LM: Sure. So in 2008 I was a heavy equipment operator, two full years of operating heavy equipment. In 2010, I ended up in a significant truck fire on a heavy hauler. These machines are two stories high. It was in the middle of the night in the middle of February. I was out in the middle of nowhere in this pitch black mine all by myself. I was actually parked on break; you get three 20-minute breaks in a 12 hour period. I was parked on break at 11 p.m. at night eating my lunch, and all of a sudden an explosion happened out the left side of my cab.

I'm of course, "What's going on?" Nobody's around me. These pieces of equipment are so big they have regulations through OH&S that you have to have a certain amount of fire suppressant system for the big pieces of equipment. It's like a huge fire extinguisher, but in your cab you have a manual actuator where you pull the pin, you hit this plunger, it automatically deploys all this fire suppressant to bat down whatever the fire is, to give you a window of opportunity to get off the machine. I pulled the pin, hit the plunger, it failed, it didn't work. So I'm on the machine thinking maybe I did something wrong, maybe I didn't hit this thing hard enough. I don't know. But I know nothing happened here, the fire is still raging, booming, and I'm stuck in this cab. Nobody's around me, how

am I going to get off this thing? So I started hitting this plunger with all my might and I'm on my two-way radio trying to relay to people where I am and the fire suppressant didn't work and blah blah blah.

So I ended up having to get out of this truck on my own. I got by the fire, thank god, but what flashed in my mind was a fellow worker that had been burnt very bad a couple of years earlier when he made a decision to get out of a burning truck he was in. He opened his cab door and the fire back-drafted at him. So when I was about to get out my driver's door I had a flash of him, and I didn't know what to do. Time is of the essence. Do I go out the driver's side or the passenger's side? If I go out the passenger's side – it's pitch dark now other than the flames that are coming off the truck, because the truck is shut down. There's no street lights, there's no nothing out there. So if I go the passenger's side I have to go over the gearshift console, there's a computer panel, the passenger's seat, my bag, other things, cleaning supplies, get out that door, maybe be disoriented on the deck of the other side, because there's smoke and it's not my normal route of travel. It's dark, I don't know if I should go that way.

All these things are going through my mind. So I decided to take a lesson from his incident, and instead of opening my door up all the way I tested it, I opened and closed it really quick to see if the fire would come in at me. It didn't, so I was like, okay, bang, out my regular route. Like I say, it's pitch dark. My regular route I can do blindfolded and now I know I can because I did it basically in the dark, which I didn't know if I could do from the other side. So out the truck, down 20 feet of ladder to the bottom level of the truck. The truck is exploding, sounded like a movie. Honest to god, it was so scary. When you get to the lower bumper you're supposed to turn around and scale down a rope ladder to the ground. That would've meant I had to turn around and look at the fire at my face. I wasn't doing that. I'm five feet off the ground, I'm going to jump from this level. So I made a decision to jump; I tried to jump two-footed. Well it's the middle of winter, I'm on a frozen dump of raw material, it's all ruts.

When I hit the ground one foot hit before the other, buckled me, ended up hitting the ground. My elbow went up under my ribs and that's how I hurt myself. So not burnt, thank god, but still physically injured. I scurried on the ground away from the truck, not knowing if it's going to explode on me or what. So I ended up in the hospital. I was on modified duty for four months. A lot of things happened. That night in the hospital, for instance, the company told me I have to come back to work before 8 o'clock in the morning. I'm in the hospital. I have to get back to work before 8, and they're going to put me in a cab and send me back out there. I'm on Demerol, whatever painkillers they've given me. I had no idea at the time that I could've said no. There was a supervisor there from my job saying, c'mon, you're going. It's a 45 minute drive back out to the site. Back out we go, and grilled by management about what my part is in the incident. I don't even have a clue. I'm injured, I'm on drugs to keep me from feeling so much pain, and here I am in a room all by myself with these guys trying to tell me that I did something wrong. I had enough brainpower to be able to say, uh uh, no, this is what happened. When you're in a situation like that you don't forget what happened. So left there.

Well little did I know, but they didn't want a loss time injury, that was the reason to get me back to work before the shift was over. If I didn't make it in for my next scheduled shift, it would've been a lost time injury. I wouldn't have made it in, maybe in a wheelchair. But anyway, I ended up on modified duty, which they have to do through our collective bargaining agreement, which I didn't realize at the time. They have to give you another job to do for being injured on the job. So I ended up in an office. I'm familiar with offices – I did law, I did legal work, secretarial work before. So four months of working with a small group of people who were all staff company people. Of course they see me hobbling around and they want to know what happened to me. They really have no idea what really goes on in the mine.

I tell them straight up, “This is what happened.” One day one girl said to me, “Well how is it going, the investigation?” I said, “Well they're supposed to be changing this and this and this.” She said, “Well you could look at that in the computer system.” I said, “Well how do I do that?” When you operate heavy equipment you're never near a computer, you're out on your equipment until the day is done, you get back in, you never get near an office. Here I am in an office with somebody who knows how to run the system. She shows me how to find my own incident in the system. I open up the incident and it was all lies. They're telling me something to my face, what's in the actual incident details is all my fault. Well

I lost my mind over it. I didn't have good representation from my elected rep that was supposed to be representing me and my co-workers. I fought through my union, through the national union. I wouldn't stop. It wasn't about me necessarily; it was I don't want this to happen to anyone else. How can this happen, that they're not putting the proper information in there, and I'm only discovering it because by happenstance this girl shows me how to look through the system and find it. I was so upset, very upset. Fought for nine months solid and ended up getting them to overturn it, apologize to me. I ran in the very...

A few months later there was an election coming up for the health and safety rep position, which the guy that was in it at the time was supposed to do, to represent me. I told him, I'm running for it and it will be mine. And it was, and it is. In 2010 I ran, I beat him and another guy, and then last year I was up for reelection and nobody ran against me. I fought very, very hard and I've come a long way, things have come a long way for the workers and worker safety. But I'm able to fight because I know I'm not going to lose my job. Other jobs I've had before where I've spoken up and said, that's not right, all of a sudden you're going to get laid off. Oh, we'll call you. That's not happening here. I get to have free voice that I can speak for the workers who either can't or won't or don't speak, and I don't have to worry about, if I'm speaking the truth I'm going to be able to be heard and not worry about my job. So, it's been just amazing. The company obviously was very upset with me for a long time. What they didn't realize and what they do realize now is that you can have safety and production hand-in-hand. It's proven as of last summer one of the directors at Suncor, fairly high up, nominated me for a presidential operational excellence award, which is a company award for individual efforts for safety on my crew along that's affected all of the processes across all of the shifts in the mine of 1200

people. I was top three in the company. So they're realizing now it's nothing but a struggle to get to that point, but the only way I was even able to get there was by having a voice through the union to be able to fight and make sure that people can realize that we're not trying to stop business here, we're not trying to shut everything down. We want people to really, what you preach about, we want them to go home safe at the end of the day. I don't preach it, I live it, I mean it, I do it, and it's getting done. And they're making more money, so they're happy too.

Q: Tell me about the union that you're part of now. How do you see the change from CEP – is it a significant change for the national union and for what you people are trying to do?

LM: For me, on the level of involvement that I have so far, I still work on the floor every day, on the ground. I'm not so much around the office to be able to pick up on all the big changes. I hear the benefits that CAW, who we joined with, some amazing programs that we don't have. In talking to some of the people that I've gotten to meet from the CAW side, they're very happy about some of the processes that we have that they don't. So it seems like it's going to be a really great merger between the two and learning from each other's things that are really good from each other. Now we have massive numbers, 300,000 members across the country. It's incredible.

Q: What should the union be doing nationally, given the present national situation and the condition facing workers?

LM: Now can we talk about politics? I love politics, or hate to love it, whatever. Wow, we had better pull up our socks and get to the ground level and make sure that the members that we have, especially the new or the last ten years at least of members, start to get some knowledge about just how powerful. I learned about it by chance really. Yes, my father was involved in it. I didn't get that total firsthand knowledge of it every day, but I knew to a degree he had good wages and he had vacation and that. But I don't think the average worker member understands just how beneficial the union is and the laws that have been passed, the fighting that's gone on. I almost think that it's become complacent the last ten maybe 15 years. We've gotten a lot and then really there was no fighting to be had other than arbitrations or collective bargaining. Maybe you'd argue with the company on your own basis, but I think all the unions basically went on their own little hubs and didn't realize now we're in a big bad position.

This Harper government is out to destroy unions completely. They're stripping our laws. If we don't stand up and get our own membership, if we don't get in touch with our own membership to get them to understand you are not going to have the productions that you had anymore, especially with legislation like the right to work legislation that they're going to try to pass. There's many bills, provincial and federal, that are being passed and nobody even understands what they are. If they don't understand, we need to get that out one way or another. We have to. I don't care if it's money to spend to do it, we have to do it or it's not going to be there.

Q: Tell us about your involvement in the NDP.

LM: From my childhood, I was interested in politics; just being around the table. It didn't mean that I had to be interested. My brothers took off, they weren't in the kitchen with the adults. I was. I enjoyed the conversations. My family on my dad's side is very witty, very quick, very sharp, very able to get their points across. I just loved it and it interested me right away. Always followed politics in the Maritimes. Back in the day we only had two channels – CBC, CTV, and maybe the French channel, which we weren't very interested in. But news was a huge part of TV at the time, and my parents always had it on and talked about it. Anyway, so as an adult as I moved from province to province and worked in different places and saw different taxes here and different benefits over here and policies that were in this province but not in that province, that exposure I got across the country, I paid attention. Not to their provincial politics but I always paid attention to federal, because to me no matter where I was in the country, those things affected me directly and obviously everyone else too. I love federal politics. So in the union atmosphere that I got into in Fort McMurray with former CEP, I was on a women's conference in Vancouver a few years ago and ended up meeting a national political action committee rep for CEP and just started talking to her about politics. I didn't even realize that there was such a thing in the union.

In my local there was no political action committee. There are in other ones, and I couldn't believe it. So I'm talking to this Patty Berara and she said, “Well you should have one in your local.” I said, “Well can I do that?” I love this. She said, “Oh my god, definitely go back and talk to your executive and see if you can start a political action committee.”

So I did. I went back to Fort McMurray from that trip and I went right to the union, I think I texted them when I was there going, I want to start a political action committee, what can I do? Am I allowed? That was a couple years ago and yes, sure enough I did right away. They appointed a member to be on the co-chair with me. To start it, I lobbied on Parliament Hill Bill 377 a year and a half ago, started to get more involved obviously with knowing the union and politics; who was backing us. Like it or not, politics has to do, it affects us. We have to have a voice. We're big as we are but we have the biggest government in the land that's trying to squish us. We need a big voice.

So I started getting to know the NDP MLAs in Alberta. I started inviting them up to Fort McMurray. I could see for a few years in Fort McMurray at that time that it wasn't a Conservative stronghold. It's a transient place; people come from other places to work. It's not like you would perceive – oh it's big oil and everybody's going to say, I'm only voting Conservative and that's the end of it. That's not the way it is. I think there's real opportunity there. So all the MLAs from Alberta have been up quite a few times. I've done some really great tours with them, the poorest part of Fort McMurray to the richest part to the in between. I've done social events where we go in a pub and have fun with the locals and talk. An MP, Ryan Cleary from Newfoundland, came up for one session, and it's been great. From there I started getting involved with the national NDP, or the

federal. Went to the NDP convention this past October November in Lethbridge, and just making more and more contacts and really making some movement.

Q: Why did you choose the NDP and not the Liberals?

LM: The NDP was an easy choice for me over the Liberals and of course the Conservatives. As far as I'm concerned, they're labour friendly. They understand. Most of them have come from union backgrounds. The NDP was founded by the labour movement. I do think there is a disconnect there as well, as I say, with the union not doing so much activism in the last x number of years to keep the membership strong. I think that happened between the party and the unions as well, and now we just need each other. We should be together. We're working for the greater good of Canadians in general. I'm totally 100 percent behind them.

Q: In the early days of the hospitality industry, what were the working conditions like?

LM: When I worked in the hospitality industry, I spent a lot of years off and on. That was my first crack at employment, was the hospitality industry. Really low wages, of course. Not only that, but if you're waitressing or bartending you get even lower wages because they think you're going to get tips. That's not fair. For one, there's no guarantee you're going to get tips. Even if people come through the door, there's no guarantee that you're going to get a tip. If you do get one, you pay taxes. You have to claim a certain amount. It's crazy. Long hours, no set schedule. You're coming in, you're working this shift. Seasonal of course – you just work like a dog through whatever season. No different than I can see these young people here that are working serving us. I'm looking at them and I'm like, I wonder how long you're working today.

But I know they're unionized here. Wow, how fortunate they are. I've talked to a few of them about how fortunate they are. Normally they've come from somewhere else where they know exactly that this was not normal that you would get eight hours a day and not have to do grunt work and be fired if you say the wrong thing. And another one is, a lot of female dominated industry, bartending for instance, I don't know how many late nights I spent alone in a bar where I didn't have a bouncer or anybody there to make sure that I was going to be okay. I was totally, you lock up when you're done. I think back now, Lord god, some scary situations that a lot of people are put in where they're alone, they don't have any contacts. I can't even imagine calling my boss at 2 a.m. to tell him that I'm having trouble. You deal with it, that would be it. Yes, just a lot of... The hospitality industry itself, you get to be very close because you all work so hard. It's very hard on your body, your feet on cement – it's tough work, tough work for low pay.

Q: Talk about some of the problems in Fort McMurray that maybe wouldn't be there if some of that wealth were sticking around there.

LM: Well yes, people that work at the big oil companies like I do, we earn a very good wage. Well Suncor is the only one that's unionized. The other companies usually wait until we bargain our collective agreement to see what our wages are, things that we get,

and then they give the same or a little better to their workers to keep them there instead of coming to us. You would think that all of the people that are in those jobs are living the life of Riley, but it's not so. Not that I feel sorry for not managing your money properly, but it's such a, it's almost like a trap. You end up with this ridiculous, they give you signing bonuses and they'll give you so much on your mortgage if you get a mortgage today as soon as you get hired. If you get a mortgage in the first three months they'll give you \$15,000 cash on your next cheque. You know how many people jump at that? \$15,000, which is \$9,000 after taxes, for a \$750,000 house, but people just, money, I can have that on my cheque.

It's crazy. So then they're going to get the boat and the camper and the four wheelers and the skidoos and the big trucks and travel all over the world. It's happening with most of the people up there that are making really good money – in debt up to their eyeballs, way over. They can never leave their jobs. That's exactly what the companies want. Spend, spend, spend. The banks will give you anything you want. Did we not learn anything from the States in '08? Fort McMurray was in bad shape when that hit in '08 too. Normally when people buy a home there they'll rent out every room in their home to contractors or people that can't afford to buy their own house. I remember in '08 when the crash happened, well all those contractors left. People that didn't have to be in Fort McMurray, if they didn't have a job, they were gone. So the people with the homes and the mortgages, the mortgage never stopped. You have to pay that x amount every month or biweekly or whatever. It was really tough for those people with the best paying jobs in Fort McMurray as a worker. Other than that, I would say only a quarter of people in Fort McMurray are doing well, if you want to say that. Most of them are not, and they have to live at the standard of living that is set by the higher echelons. Very sad! The services are terrible for a place that has so much wealth. The hospital is tiny. There's no old age home. There's a huge controversy going on up there with the government and the people right now since a few years. Schools are exploding. I think there's, now don't quote me for sure, but there is something like 200 births a month in Fort McMurray in the last year or two. It's just crazy. The top floor of the hospital is the old age floor, that's it. There's only four floors in the hospital. For a place that is just rolling in money, the traffic is ridiculous.

Highway 63, if you've ever heard of it, is the death highway of Canada. It's just ridiculous. Money was allocated to twin that thing, and why shouldn't it be, years ago. The only way in for these massive pieces of equipment is by truck. They take up the entire road when they're coming up to Fort McMurray. It's 245 km straight of hardly any passing lanes. Well they just twinned one little part of it, 35 km or something. Then the poor people that work in lower paying jobs, I don't know how they do it. There is a homeless population, there's a lot of good work that's going on volunteering through shelters and things. But a lot of people come there thinking Fort McMurray is the dream and you'll be able to just get a job like that and you'll be making the big money. They come with few bucks in their pocket and a duffle bag, and they're on the street and they're going to the shelter. You try to rent a hotel room, you're probably not even going to be able to find one. If you can, you're talking a lot of money. People just don't get the picture of what's really going on there.

Q: What is the answer? In what general direction does the answer lie?

LM: The general, big oil is making the money. It's not coming back in the community as much as they'd like to say that it is, for the amount of tax breaks they're getting and royalties. It's just pathetic. I see reports from the company of their earnings, we all do, their quarterly earnings and their annual earnings. Oh we're doing so well and we made another billion dollars this quarter. But we're going to cut housing over here and we're going to take your, because the company also gives so much money, and this trickles down to all the contractors and workers too. If the company starts taking away little benefits that are not in the collective bargaining agreement, they start taking things away from the unionized workers or the fulltime company workers, contractors are sure to follow. So there's lots of contractors that would offer the camp, you can stay in camp for free. You can get flights back and forth to wherever you live, you can get a living out allowance, which is called an LOA. Well they start taking those things away from workers that are traveling back and forth, playing with people's livelihood constantly until they get a shortage of workers. And now we get into temporary foreign worker program where it's totally starting to get abused very badly by companies just bringing in without following the guidelines that are set. There's some bad stuff going on there.

Q: Is the TFW program only coming into the hospitality industry, or have you seen it on the big jobs?

LM: Oh yes, big jobs.

Q: What sorts of positions are they being hired for?

LM: I would say mostly labourer positions, maintenance kind of things for now. I don't have the exact company. There's was one, Morton North of Fort McMurray, recently that had a few hundred people at least that were laid off and temporary foreign workers were brought in to their same positions. I've heard of ones, whether it's true or not, where the qualifications to get hired on the job were crazy and then the bottom one would be you had to speak Mandarin. Okay, well I am a Canadian that fits all the criteria except for that one, and I'm not going to get the job. How can they get away with that? The company can ask for any kind of worker they want. If you don't fit the bill as a Canadian citizen they can say, I couldn't find any Canadians to work it. So there's some bad stuff going on for sure.

Q: A female heavy equipment operator is not the norm. Were there any issues involved with that for you?

LM: Anything you can think of. Sexually harassed from the day I started on the job at Suncor.

LM: This is the way it went. You start there, you start a training program in a classroom, you do a few days on a computer learning procedures and policies and all this stuff, and

signing forms that you're going to do things a certain way. You go with a mentor truck trainer. You always start on the big trucks. You go with them for like a week or maybe a little more if you need to; it just depends on your level of how quick you learn and if you've had any experience before, whatever.

The first week I was on with a mentor on this heavy hauler. I was actually staying in camp, because when Suncor hired me from Ontario, they gave me three months, and they did this standard with anybody from out of the province or whatever, out of Fort McMurray - three months of paid room and board at a camp that was basically onsite very close to the oil sands. They'd bus you back and forth, with meals and all this stuff, private room. It was great. Three months to get yourself a permanent place in Fort McMurray. So I'm in camp.

I'm going to work every day, I'm with a mentor. Well the way it was set up I work 8 to 8. By the time I'd finish my shift I'd end up, by the time I'd get back to camp it would be almost 9 o'clock and the kitchen closed at 8:30. You weren't allowed to have toasters in your room or a microwave or anything like that, so every day I was coming back from work with no food. So my mentor felt really bad for me. Little did I know he went and told the supervisor, this poor girl's not eating. You take your lunch with you in the morning, but you're in the heavy hauler all day and you don't have a fridge. You take what's going to last for as long as it's going to last for 12 or 15 hours and you deal with it. So I couldn't take breakfast, lunch, supper and snacks with me in the haul truck for that long. So anyway, he tells the supervisor without me knowing that is there something they can do to get me off the truck a little bit earlier so I can catch an earlier bus that'll get me to camp so I can get to the kitchen before it closes.

So all of a sudden the next day or whatever the supervisor comes to the haul truck and calls me down. My mentor says, go with him, he's going to make sure you get in for supper. Okay, right on. All I've heard from the interviews I've done and reading about Suncor and everything from beginning to start was how family oriented they were and how nice they are and how much they care about their employees. I thought, well this is just great. Wow, I've really hit the jackpot here, I'm so glad I came out here - until I got in the pickup truck. I'm a very open person, grew up in a culture of I have nothing to hide, I'm very proud of where I come from. This guy was originally from Newfoundland, so a lot of talk about Cape Breton, Newfoundland; "Oh how long have you been here."

I'm thinking this is just a normal conversation. Wow, this guy's my supervisor, awesome, very personable guy. Gets me where I need to go and that was fine the first day. He's picking me up now every day, now this is with the premise that he's getting me to an early bus, that he's helping me out so I can go get supper every day. Well every day we're driving in. Through the mine, which is massive, it takes however long, half hour or maybe an hour to get to the dry, we call it, to change out of your coveralls and go catch the bus. So we're having nice long conversations about life and I'm telling him just what I'm telling you, how I made my way there and I'm in camp and I'm single, I don't have kids - just those things are coming out as we're talking.

Little did I know this guy is sizing me up. Within a few days he starts to... Oh I get signed off on my own, I end up on my own unit. He's everywhere that I am. I mean this mine is big. I don't understand what's going on. But I stop for break and I'm going in like an Atco trailer in the middle of the boonies. I'll stop for my 20 minute break and be coming out of the lunch shack or whatever, and there he is. I'm not an idiot. You can't be everywhere I am all the time. You're a supervisor, you're supposed to be somewhere else I would say.

Anyway, I remember one night my truck broke down. Bang, he's there. C'mon, we'll take you to a different truck. By this time I started to get a little uncomfortable about how much this guy is around. But nobody is telling me anything, I'm just getting this feeling myself. You're isolated in your piece of equipment, you don't get much time to talk to other people unless you're changing. I'm in the girls' locker room, the girls don't know me, I don't know them. I'm just starting to learn everybody and then you're out to your own equipment and nobody really knows anybody that well.

Anyway, so nobody was telling me anything about this guy, but he had a history of doing this I end up finding out after. I learned the hard way. He picked me up from my truck when it broke down one night, doesn't take me to another truck, says he has to go do something. Ends up parking on the side of this road and there's some traffic going by and he's gotta watch the traffic pattern or something, and he starts talking to me about drugs. He says, ah I love cocaine, I just think it's the best thing ever. First of all, I don't do drugs and I'm not happy about you talking to me about it. You're a supervisor, why are you even bringing something like this up? I flat out told him, that's not my scene. I'm Irish, I'm a Cape Bretoner. I like my drink, don't worry about that, but that's not my bag. Anyway, so he starts talking about his wife. He's married, got a baby and one on the way. But he lives in an open relationship with his wife, and he wants an mistress and I am the one he wants.

Flat out, flat out. I'm in the pickup truck, nobody around, with the supervisor. Oh my god. I'm still on probation. What am I going to do? I'm in camp, I moved from Ontario. What the hell am I going to do now to not piss this guy off but get him away from me? What a predicament. Anyway, thank god I'm quick on my feet, which I'm sure a lot of girls have gone through with him that aren't. I ended up just kind of negotiating with him and saying, well I had a boyfriend on one time that cheated on me and it just broke my heart and I could never do that to anybody. If that's your lifestyle that's your lifestyle, but that's just not me and I'm just not... Without trying to say, you pig. Oh my god. Anyway, I was basically blacklisted after that by him. Because I didn't go his way, and sort of put down his lifestyle or whatever. I doubt that it's true that it's the lifestyle anyway, I'm sure he was just a cheater. I'm sure she wasn't out living an open lifestyle; she was pregnant, for god's sake. Anyway, so that was from day one. I was on the blacklist from then, and it was tough.

Q: Talk more about the difficulties for women in nontraditional jobs.

LM: It was very difficult, obviously, after I had that conversation with him, then to go in the next day and it was very, very obvious that I was being treated differently all of a sudden. It wasn't so much, did you get in for supper tonight? There was no more concern if I got to have supper at camp at night anymore, I could starve for all they cared. He obviously was very good buddies with all his supervisors and managers. It went like wildfire I guess that I was not playing along, and probably going to be trouble. At the time, thankfully, I was on probation still but it was before the crash in '08 and they were very, very much in need of workers, especially equal opportunity women that had experience. I'm sure they just hoped I'd shut my mouth and go away and just drive a truck for the rest of my life and be grateful I had a job that paid so well - especially as a female. I ended up getting my full-time status, then started to realize what that meant is that I'm not protected. Wow, big difference.

Q: Any other discrimination or suggestions that women shouldn't be doing these nontraditional jobs?

LM: I would say on the company side middle management for sure and frontline supervision were still... Middle management, because normally they've been there for 30 plus years. They've gone through the ranks of frontline supervision, they've only made it as far as middle management, which isn't that far if you've been there that long. Really still old boy's club. Frontline supervision is pretty much henpecked by these guys, so they try to get the same type of people that are out there. But I'll tell you, the workers themselves, the members that are out there. There are a few. Everything out there is done on two-way radio. You don't see each other, because you're in your own piece of equipment. But you can talk on the microphone and there are 300 people. There are different channels and there might be 50 people on this one, 100 on that one or whatever.

So your voice and your tone and how you come across is how you define yourself. It's not by your looks. Nobody can see your face, they can't see your emotion – it's all in your voice. So there is some animosity that comes through, but it's mostly from the older generation of men. But sometimes I think they slip, because for the most part they're really good. Actually in the years that I've been there they come to really appreciate the women operators because we're more careful and we take our time more. We just care more about what we're doing, and it's a gained appreciation. But I have to say the younger generation; we may as well be the same sex. There is no difference. I would say 30 and under men, they're just like they're working with their buddy. It's really good, really good.

Q: What plant-wide changes did you implement?

LM: When I started in the health and safety rep role it was very challenging because I was considered a pain in the ass to the company for one, because I had just fought for nine months about my incident that they didn't want to take blame for, and I ended up winning. I have to say, the rep that I beat out in the election wasn't too happy with me either, because he was in his role for a long time. So I didn't really get any information from him to help me learn the role when I got into it. Basically I was on my own and I

had to start building, figuring out how I could get things done that needed to be done. I knew what needed to be done. I'm been out there, I'm out there, I work there, I know there's OH&S law, I know there's a collective bargaining agreement, I know this stuff is in black and white.

There are company standards and policies and procedures, and how am I going to get the benefit out of this for the workers to get it to happen and what can I do to make things better? So for instance one of the things that we didn't have as a crew, 300 people, imagine a long hallway almost like a school hallway. You walk down this hallway, it's 400 feet long and you're passing by supervisors and grabbing your lineup sheet and away you go and you're on the clock, you're out, you get out. Get your lineup, get your gear on, get out the door, get on your piece of equipment, and that's it. So you need personal protective equipment, PPE. You are issued a hardhat obviously when you get hired, safety glasses, gloves, you bring your own boots. There are certain things that are standard PPE. But for us in the mine, we'd go down this long hallway on a time limit and we didn't have access to any of the things. If your gloves were ripped there was nowhere to just like grab this in your 30-second "get the hell out the door." There was down this hallway and over here, but you didn't have time; you're really shuttled out like cattle. So that was a big thing for me.

Earplugs, cleaning supplies for your truck or your piece of equipment, all this stuff I ended up fighting really hard to get. We ended up, there was lots of ideas of what we came up with of things that we needed to have available for us. I ended up negotiating with the company to make it as good for them as us and save money. If you have a big wall of cabinets where people can just grab things and go, of course some people are going to abuse that – they'll take a stack of gloves instead of a pair of gloves. So it was hard to convince the company we need to do something but we need to be able to control it too. It took me almost two years of working with this person and that person in the company. They were transferred and you'd have to start with a new person, going through my joint health and safety committee and negotiating what we could do. We ended up getting this last, about a year ago, vending machines of PPE. It's like pop and chips coming out, everything is the exact same. So you get a PIN number, you program your own PIN number into this machine, you vend out whatever item you want, from flashlights to whatever, and away you go. It's 'bang bang' and it's right in that long hallway, it doesn't make any, it's not a big deal, it didn't take up any more room than anything else would in that hallway. They can track it, the company, to see if people are abusing it. In the first six months they made a million dollars savings on what people were either throwing away. Or like I say, if they had the time to go down to that warehouse that would've been down there, they'd be grabbing gobs of things.

So anyway it turned out to be beneficial, and it works through all shifts. So they not only did it for the mine, they ended up transferring it to all of our sites. There's ones that have tools in them for the mechanics, there's all kinds and they do it all over the place, in the plants and all over. I'm sure it'll go farther than that. Suncor is opening Fort Hills Project soon and they're going to implement all this there. You always have to negotiate with the company. It's almost like you have to make a business plan of how you can show where

they're going to save money on something, besides the benefit of health and safety. So that's another one I did.

The heavy haulers are two stories high, the tail lights are very small on them and they're 24 feet up in the air. You need to clean them; they get dirty. You're working in the mud and you're constantly in the elements. Not only OH&S law that you have to have your lights visible at all times, but you really should because it's very dangerous. It's the only thing that you can see to identify a truck. Sometimes the truck is so dirty it just melds into the scenery where you wouldn't even, as big as it is, unless you see it coming from the front with these little tiny headlights on them, you could actually not see them. It's crazy, from behind especially. So I ended up getting this, they had these two cleaning tools. There's like 500 km or road out there, two places where you could clean your lights, and they were at fuel stations. Operators weren't allowed to just pull in there any time they wanted, they were only allowed to go in there when they were sent there by dispatch on your computer panel when you needed fuel.

So I fought really hard about that through OH&S again and said, it's absolutely unacceptable. If I see a truck or I hear somebody call somebody and say, 222 truck you need to clean your lights, I can't see them at all, I would hear the operator come back and say, yes I'm supposed to go in for a fuel pretty soon, I'll get them then. No, they're not visible, you're not visible; you have to stop. Of course that was my way to convince the company that you'd better put stations all over the mine at all of the lunch facilities where we can have easy accessibility and people can go in and scrape them off and away they go. So I did that. It took a long time to convince them, but what I had to do is convince the workers that if you're told or you see that your lights are dirty, you stop. Believe me, if you stop they're going to do something pretty quick; they want you to keep rolling. You stop and you say, "I'm not supposed to run, OH&S law, Lori said..." Yes, my name gets thrown around quite a bit.

Q: How would the refining of bitumen provide a way of shifting the economy in the area?

LM: Being in the energy sector as I am and being a union member and a heavy equipment operator and an active political person from a place raised that I had to leave to find gainful employment, I hear the arguments about pipelines and how are we going to sustain the oil sands and what's the best route to go. I'm looking at the federal government's vision and I'm not happy about it. There's no reason why we can't refine our oil here. The thing is that bitumen, what I do, what I haul on the trucks that I drive, is not oil. It's bitumen, it's sand and oil and different mixtures. It has to go through a plant that separates it, they add chemicals and separate the oil and then you go and you upgrade it and you refine it. We do some of that at Suncor right now. We were developing another project, a massive project at Suncor called Voyageur. There was millions and millions of dollars into the creation of it a couple years ago. It ended up one day, bang the brakes went on and the project is shut down. They had so much money and time into it already. We were going to refine a lot more barrels per day right there on site. All the people that

were, right from the people in Fort McMurray that are desperate to get into the big jobs. They can't think everybody is working at the oil sands and making a fortune.

No. It would've been so beneficial just for the population that is struggling in Fort McMurray let alone the rest of the population that can potentially come out here too. There's refineries in Edmonton, there's some across the country. But we're willing to build pipelines to take it across the border. Alberta's not a very big province to go north and south. From Fort McMurray to the border of the States is not very far; it will not take long to build that pipeline. Once it's built the jobs are gone. All they need is people to monitor the pipeline from then on. That bitumen is going sailing down those pipelines to somewhere in Texas or wherever, going to refineries down there. Those workers are able to sustain their jobs down there. Our jobs are gone. You don't continually work on a pipeline at full staff for x number of years. Not only that, but we're digging up the oil sands so fast it's dig baby dig. They're giving contracts out left right and centre to wherever. No regulation basically, get Suncor, whoever, give them more land, lease more plots. My issue with that is, first of all you say there's not enough workers to do the job in the first place, so why would you open umpteen more sites, and then it's a natural resource. But it's not a renewable resource. When we dig it out of the ground and pipe it down the pipe it's gone, it's not coming back. So we're digging our way out of work even vaster piping it out of the country even faster, bringing people in from different countries under the temporary forieng worker program that the government has passed, taking jobs away even faster. The endless list is very scary. I'm not happy.

The NDP is supporting pipelines through Canada. The two that want to go to the States and to the west coast through land that shouldn't even be touched in BC, I totally understand why, just to pipe it to Asia. The NDP gets criticized for well, if you're against pipelines why do you want the, you agree with one but not the other. Well it's not about necessarily pipelines. We can keep the jobs in Canada. Canada is a very big country east to west, that's a lot of jobs for a long time, and we're pumping it to a refinery that's in Canada, we're not pumping it to the States and Asia. So we're maintaining jobs, creating jobs across the country, so it's a slam-dunk for me, for all of us.

Q: Anything else you'd like to say?

LM: I'd like to have a beer.

[END]