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JL: I work in Lethbridge for the Holy Spirit School Division and I'm a librarian at the high school.

Q: How long have you been doing this work?

JL: I've been a librarian for many years, probably close to 35 years, I guess. No sorry, ya about 30 years I've been working as a librarian. I got into librarianship because I like to direct people and to help with research and with materials that they can enjoy or learn from.

Q: What's the importance of libraries?

JL: In our library, it's a high school library, we have quite a few nonfiction resources. But you can get such good material on Internet, so we do rely quite a bit on collection development for fiction and for free reading for entertainment and also for learning from historical novels. Or, helping students who might have English as a Second Language students, we have graphic novels and easy reading materials that are aimed at their grade level. The library is also a place to study, to research, and to have an opportunity to sit with your friends, do homework collaboratively, and just to become familiar with the world of literature. We also help staff to find resources for teaching. We provide streaming services as well as videos, and help point staff in the right direction to find what they need to teach.

Q: What is your background?

JL: I come from Lethbridge, Alberta. I had parents who were very concerned that in the modern world then it was important to have an education. We were all sent to some kind of post secondary. I ended up having a degree in English. I worked for a while in a library and decided that librarianship was a good direction. So, I got my library training at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I went to work at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, where I met my husband, who was from Edmonton. Subsequently, we established ourselves in Edmonton. We lived in Drumheller at the Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, where I established the research library there. Then we moved back to Edmonton, from there to Calgary, and ended up back in Lethbridge where I was born. I've been working in the school system since then.

Q: Why can't students just use the municipal library? What's the importance of having a library right in the school?

JL: We collaborate, we work closely with the public library system. But the library in the school, we can gear it directly to the interests of the students who are there. It also ensures that there is a learning environment outside of their classes that is just around the corner.

Q: When you spoke at the convention today, you talked about a disturbing trend that's happening in schools.

JL: In Alberta public schools, which are considered the public school system, the Catholic school system and the francophone school system, are all fully funded for all students. There's often a small fee that is associated, but that fee can be waived for any reason that the parent does not want to pay it. So public education in Alberta is free and available to all. Private schools used to be partially funded, but now I think it's up to 70 percent of the funding for private schools comes from the government. To have specialized schools for specialized needs in itself is not an issue. The issue is when you have schools that deny admittance to anybody who wishes to apply. That means that you can go to a private school if you have the money, if you're of a certain type. Perhaps you're athletic, perhaps you are good academically – those are the students that are singled out to go to private schools. There are schools that are based on religion, and they are allowed to discriminate against students of different sexual orientations; it is within their right to do so. Public schools must accept everybody regardless of who they are, what their abilities are. If they are handicapped or if they have any kind of disability, they are just accepted, there's no question asked. But private schools can discriminate. It's partly the funding that is going to the private schools. If you choose to educate your children in a private school system and if you want to pay the full balance of that, that's fine. But when you take money away from public education to put it into specialized programs that do not serve the entire population, it becomes an issue.

Q: Does it strike you that public schools are democratizing institutions?

JL: Ya. It's interesting, because I recently came across a situation in which somebody was writing the curriculum for Math for an elementary school. I was astounded by that, because a Math curriculum for Grade 4 should be a standardized curriculum for the province. You can teach it in your own way, but there should be outcomes at the end of the year that every student has been able to achieve. It concerns me when you have individual teachers who've been teaching for a while who say, this is the way it should be taught. Not necessarily the way it should be taught, but this is what the students need to hear, this is what the students need to learn. I worry about the students when they finish Grade 12 and they start looking for jobs, when they want to apply to universities, when they want to go to college, they do not have the prerequisites because they do not have the basics that should be common to all students when they graduate from Grade 12. Not having to follow the Alberta curriculum, to me, is a very serious concern. Not having to have accredited teachers is a very serious concern. There are certain levels of standardization that should be there if you want to have publicly funded education. It is a right, it is an absolute right to have an education, just as it is a right to have healthcare, just as it is to have so many things. We have to have a society in which certain things are just accepted as normal. They're not questions, they're not add-ons – they're just basic human rights.

Q: Is the funding of private schools a growing threat?

JL: I think there's always been private schools, and I can't really speak to that. But I do know that chartered schools, when they decided to give charters to schools, there were 14 chartered schools 20 years ago. Now there are 159 private and chartered schools in Alberta, and that number is growing. When you have 359 school authorities in Alberta, 379 are public school authorities and 150 are private school authorities, you're now getting a ratio of one to two that are now private schools. That's a concern. I don't think the numbers are there; private schools tend to be smaller. But at the same time, you are increasing significantly the number of private schools and charter schools in the province.

Q: Are the rich kids getting a superior education from private schools?

JL: Private schools don't have to adhere to the numbers that public schools have. When you have poor funding for education, as we have in Alberta, and the funding for education, although the new government has promised half a billion dollars in increases, that's after four years of poor funding. It is barely a catchup for the last four years. Funding went from \$6.4 billion when the NDP went out, in the last four years it was down as low as \$5.9 billion in a year. Now they're back up to \$6.6 billion, which is a small increase over five years ago. So funding for education is very poor, and that affects the number of students who are in classes, it affects the school buildings, it affects the wages for the staff. Support staff especially are very poorly paid. It also affects the ability for teachers to be able to teach classes that are large and diverse. If you have many students in your class who are inclusive ed students and need additional help, there aren't supports, there aren't EAs, there aren't other people who can help the teacher to teach the classes. There isn't the ability to have one on one sessions with students and teachers. Private schools don't run into that, because they can limit their class sizes. They're also limiting it by determining what their criteria is. If they decide that they're going to have only high academics or they're just going to have a sports school, or whatever their criteria is, they can choose who can go into the schools and they can limit their classes.

Q: Do you have private schools in Lethbridge?

JL: I know that there are many private schools in the communities around Lethbridge. I haven't looked at that demographic in particular. I was looking at it province wide when I was coming to the Alberta CUPE convention, because it's for the entire province, so I was looking more for that. But I know there are small towns that can have private schools with less than 100 students. It almost looks like a home-based business where you can just decide that, well we're going to have a private school, and it's okay, so you can teach what you want, and that's okay. You can have whoever teaching it, and that's okay. I don't want to denigrate them and say that they're just calling people in off the street, and I don't know; perhaps I shouldn't go down this route, because I don't know exactly who they're hiring. But when you do have very small schools that are very specialized, then you end up I think with a situation in which you are creating a class society. You're not aiming your education system at everybody.

Q: What does this have to do with unions?

JL: It's the privatization that is the concern I really think. When privatization hits schools, then you're hitting tomorrow's leaders and workers. I think that the more we have a society in which everybody is included, you have diversity, you have inclusion and you have this great variety of people and abilities, then the better the situation is going to be for Alberta. Just anecdotally, I have two sons, and one son had a child who is severely autistic and nonverbal in their class. That class as a whole was more tolerant toward students who were different than my other son, where they didn't get it. They didn't understand why this student couldn't talk. But when you have a student in your classroom that has a disability or has a mobility issue or something where there's some kind of accommodation, the whole class learns from that. That to me was a great lesson to show how you need to have everybody in the same classroom. Privatization removes part of that.

Q: What can the union do about it?

JL: We are asking the union people, CUPE Alberta is asking that we lobby the government to reduce the number of or at least not increase the number of – I'm not sure exactly what the wording should be. But privatization of schools is a threat. It's a threat to students in Alberta and it's a threat to the young people of tomorrow who are going to be graduating and going out into the workplace. We need to have public education for everybody and it has to be on an equal playing field.

Q: And how is it a threat to your fellow members?

JL: To CUPE members? I think it takes money away from public education and it also takes away our efforts, because we end up with more of the students who need the additional help and we end up with students who are denied the education of a private school. We have to work harder to ensure that our education, our teaching, our work with the children is effective.

Q: What has happened to the pay for the people providing those services?

JL: Support staff have fallen severely behind in their wages. The minimum wage in Alberta went from \$9.75 ten years ago and then it was raised to \$15, and it has been \$15 for the last five years, so that has not increased. But that increase from \$9.75 to \$15 over ten years is a 54 percent increase. Over the same period of time, educational support workers have received 0.97 percent as an average wage. That meant that many locals received zero and some received 2 percent, but overall they've received a general increase of 0.97 percent. So with inflation and cost of living, just over the last 10 years to receive practically nothing is such a backwards step. Inflation in the last 10 years in Alberta has been 22 percent. Their loss of buying power, their loss of ability to support themselves has really been impacted. There are fewer educational supports in the schools, because schools with education funding being so poor, there's less money for staff. So they have fewer educational assistants, they have fewer library staff, there are fewer admin assistants. So overall there are fewer staff, and the staff that are there have their hours cut. If you

used to have 30 hours it could be 28, or if you had 15 hours. . . Library clerks in our school division get 15 hours a week. And that is an absolute limit; they can't even have more than that.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?

JL: I don't know, you've been pretty thorough in your questions. I don't know what else I can address.

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