

Interview: Russ Leech (RL)
Interviewer: Rod Mickleburgh (RM)
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Transcription: Jane Player

RM [00:00:05] All right. We're here with Russ Leech, and let's start off right at the beginning. Your background and a bit of a tragic background in some ways, but just tell us about your family and what happened. Goes back to Manitoba, I gather?

RL [00:00:19] It does. My father was in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and he was taking training at Brandon, Manitoba. It was in the winter. I was born December the 9th, and—that was 1942—my mother fell, and so I was delivered two months premature.

RM [00:00:38] Wow.

RL [00:00:39] Otherwise, I would have been born here and be a real Victorian. However, my father went overseas, and he was killed there two years later. My mother came back to Victoria, and we lived with her mother and father, and so I grew up with my grandparents. She eventually got—

RM [00:00:59] Would that be in Brandon?

RL [00:01:00] No. In Victoria.

RM [00:01:01] Oh, okay.

RL [00:01:02] I was a Brandonite for about a month. (laughter)

RM [00:01:06] So, that's quite something. You never knew your dad?

RL [00:01:08] No, I didn't, and my mother got remarried. I don't know how old I was. I guess I was about four, and I have a stepsister born here. The family moved to Palm Springs, when I was about five, and—I was five—and my grandparents came down about six months later to visit. They found that I was being mistreated by my stepfather. So, they convinced my mother to let me go back with them. I had another sister born in Palm Springs. They moved to Las Vegas, and they grew up there. My mother became more like an aunt, and my sisters, you know, I didn't have a real association with them, but I was lucky. Otherwise, I'd be a terrible American. (laughter) My grandfather and my grandmother then became my mum and dad, and my father and my mother, before she was down to the States, created the Local 3 of the Machinists and Outside Fitters in the dockyard. [Machinists' Fitters & Helpers Industrial Union Local 3]

RM [00:02:24] The two of them together?

RL [00:02:26] Yes. They kinda, you know, got people to sign. And he—

RM [00:02:31] Where was this?

RL [00:02:31] In here, Victoria, everything is in Victoria.

RM [00:02:34] Well, how did Brandon show up?

RL [00:02:35] Only that—

RM [00:02:36] Oh, that's because his training was there?

RM [00:02:38] Yes.

RM [00:02:38] And she went with them?

RL [00:02:39] Yes.

RM [00:02:40] Ah, gotcha. Okay.

RL [00:02:41] And we were back on the train after he —

RM [00:02:44] Yes. Okay.

RL [00:02:45] So, he—I was two when he was killed. Then—so they had created that union. He became the business agent, and he actually took a case to the Supreme Court of Canada and won. However, so I grew up in the— Pardon?

RM [00:03:08] Do you remember what the case was?

[00:03:09] Not remember, but do you know what the case was—

RL [00:03:11] No, I can't remember. Although there was, when he passed, they had quite a spread in the Times Colonist about him and so it's retrievable. So, I grew up in a union family, and then—

RM [00:03:29] Your grandfather was a union person—

RL [00:03:30] That's right. Who was my dad as far as I was concerned. Right. So, when I got out of high school—how much do you really want?

RM [00:03:42] No, keep going. I'll stop you when it gets boring. (laughter)

RL [00:03:44] Okay, well, they had a—I didn't know what I was going to do. All my friends signed up to go to the Zeballos Iron Mines up on the interior Vancouver Island, and I was left. So, I joined this six week training course, was the nuclear re-entry. At the time, you know, there was a lot of concern. I enjoyed it. They offered me a job. I did very well. They offered me a job as a sergeant, and I refused. It was going to be an intelligence corps doing their photo reconnaissance stuff like that. I wasn't interested in being a spy. (laughter) So, I went through a bunch of little jobs, you know, working at the Bay, Eaton's swamping and china, electrical maintenance and everything. Then I got a job in the Ministry of Forestry Research. I ran in—afoul of my boss. Not a big deal, but he gave me a bad report when he was leaving to go for his doctorate. So, he wanted me to go to Vancouver with him and be his assistant, but I couldn't afford it to go there and pay when I was living at home here. I put in a complaint to what was the BC Government Employees' Association.

RM [00:05:05] You were a member of that?

RL [00:05:06] Yes, I was. Of course. That's the first thing I did because of my background. I remember my dad saying, 'Be sure to join the union.' Of course, they didn't have a union, but the association.

RM [00:05:18] They did their best to function as a union.

RL [00:05:20] Yes. Well, they. Not really. They were more like a social outfit. They kind of had social events for the members. Baseball games, that kind of stuff. You know, picnics—

RM [00:05:32] Win trips to the old country. (laughter)

RL [00:05:34] Anyway, this is leading to something. I put in my complaint. I went to the tribunal, which was the way they did grievances then. Presented my case, had lots of witnesses, because up until the guy actually wrote that report, I was doing, swell, you know. So anyway, I won that. The thing was supposed to be expunged. I was supposed to get a job, another job because he had left, and I was no longer an assistant. So, in the meantime, I went, and I went to VMD, Victoria Machinery Depot, and that's where my father was the business agent. So, I was there for several years, but things got tough there. There were two weeks on. Two weeks off. I got married, had a child on the way. Was worried about, you know, having something solid. So, I started looking for other jobs, and a friend who worked in highways phoned to tell me there was a vacancy coming up, so I applied. I had—one of the jobs that I had previously was with the blueprint Department of Highways, so they knew who I was. I applied at the office and was hired through the office. About a year later my son got the measles. My wife also worked. She worked downstairs in the Douglas Building from where I was in the Ministry of Mines. We thought, well, if we each take a period of time off, it won't be so hard on each of our ministries. So, she took two days off; I took three days off. That gave us nine days with the weekends, and our son already had spots. You know, it's a ten day event, so we figured that was fine. But then what happened was each ministry said the other parent should have taken the whole time, so neither ministry would give us the time. I was really upset about that, but my boss said, 'Don't worry about it. We'll fix it.' Short time later, we were moving because they didn't want children in the building where we were staying. We were looking for a house and we found one. My son was born in our house, so I'm telling you like we moved. But it was when we were moving with the house. It was actually, this was—the measles story came later.

RM [00:08:20] Okay.

RL [00:08:20] Okay.

RM [00:08:21] But that was a big deal, that measles thing?

RL [00:08:24] It was for me. It was the injustice of it, but it got worse. When we were moving, we were going to move from the apartment when they wouldn't take children to a house that we bought. Twelve thousand, five hundred I bought. Third acre. It's now—we pay taxes on 1.25 million. It's crazy. However, okay, so when we were moving, I asked for time off to move. At the same time, one of the other members in the office who was a friend of mine, was also moving, but he was in a different section. So, my boss said, 'Sure, take the day off, paid'. The other guy said, 'No, you can't have the time.' And then finally, after pleading, he got half a day off with no pay. The reason that he was able to do that was because they used to have a manual that supervisors used to say what they could

and couldn't do. My boss said, 'Well, it says here you can have time off if I say so.' The other guy says, 'I'm in charge here. You're not doing that.' So, that was the second thing that kind of triggered my mind. This isn't right.

RL [00:09:46] Then the measles thing happened, and then I got called in. This is like a year later, you know, like, this is like in '73. I was called in to say that I wouldn't be able to work there any longer because there is this bad report on my Ministry of Forests was still there. Which was supposed to be—I said, 'This is baloney.' They said, 'Well, look. Well, You were hired through the office and that's wrong, you should have been hired through the Public Service Commission. And so, you're going to have to write the exam.' There's a math exam, a 3D exam and drafting. You had to be able to do. So, I went and took these exams, and I thought in the math exam they had all these funny things, like, you're in a rowboat and you're looking at that lighthouse and you're out this far. And how, what's the angle, and how high is the lighthouse and all these kind of funny little stories about math. After the test, everybody's having coffee. 'How tall was the lighthouse? About 60 feet.' 'Oh, no,' I said, 'I didn't get that.' 'How about, how far was it across the river?' 'Oh, no, I didn't get that.' I went back pretty downhearted because I'm thinking I'm gonna lose. So, they called me back into the personnel office. 'They said, 'Well, congratulations. You did okay in the test. So, you are going to be able to stay.' I said, 'Well, gee, I was really I was thinking I was lost.' He said, 'Well, out of the 30 people who wrote it, only three people passed. (laughter) All those other guys had all the wrong answers, right.

RL [00:11:39] So anyway, just going back to when my son had the measles and I was talking about get the time off, the personnel officer asked me if my son had died. I said, 'You'll rue the day you ever said that.' So okay, 1974 the union is being formed. Fellow called John Shafley was kind of commissioned to set up what would become the 12 components. I was assisting him in doing that. So, we're shuffling the people saying, all these people will be here. And, during that time I—we had an election, and the election was we just elect the executive. No particular positions. Then the people who were elected got together and we said, 'Okay, this guy will be chair, this guy will be vice chair, etcetera. A year later we had real elections at that time. So, during that period of time, I was like the chairperson of, of well, I have it down here somewhere [Membership Chairman Local 1101].

RL [00:12:54] Okay, just keep going. Just tell the story, Russ.

RL [00:12:56] Okay. Well, I was—did a lot of phoning. So, I went to my boss, and I said, 'I'm going to be kind of off the job quite a lot because I have to do all this work, and I'm concerned that I'm standing in the middle of the room on the phone.' So, they set me up with my own phone, and so I had the union phone in my office, which was a first, I think. Then when we finally had our elections, I became the secretary treasurer. That's where I met Adam Ustik. The people who became the chairperson was, Ken Austin and his vice was Gordon Pengelly. They went off to, we had to go to the provincial executive—or of the component, you know, component executive.

RM [00:13:52] What component was this? The highways?

RL [00:13:53] Eleven.

RM [00:13:54] Was this the highways component?

RL [00:13:56] Well, they were in it. Component 11 was engineering, technical and inspectional. So, anything to do with engineering, things like that. They were there, and I was back phoning all these people and getting stewards set up and everything. Well, a short time later, like a year—I guess they were in for a two-year term. So, a couple years later Ed Honcharuk, who was one of the staff reps at the time, and Tom MacKay, the chairperson of the component, turned up and met with Adam Ustik and myself. Adam was a member-at-large at the time, and they told the story to us about how these guys were over at headquarters, causing a lot of problems in the component, and that they were after us to get rid of us off of our local executive. And they're going to run a fellow called Ron Jardine against me. I kind of didn't believe it because Ken Austin was one of the guys who had testified on my behalf in the tribunal, and so he was a friend of mine as far as I was concerned. But I looked around and I saw indeed they were running Ron Jardine. So, Adam and I formed a friendship and a team to run against them. In the next elections we did. We beat them out and we became—he became the chair, and I was second vice or something.

RM [00:15:33] People like [John] Fryer and so on, did they try to intervene in this, or did they pretty well leave everything alone?

RL [00:15:38] They weren't involved yet. Ed was the staff assigned to my component at the time. So, there we are now. Adam goes off to become the chair, and I came as the second delegate, and, I was like, I think I was second vice chair, something like that. But we started as a team. We became—we started thinking about various things that we would like to do. We held, for example, we held the first stewards' appreciation night. We created the Stewards of the Year Award. We created, like business cards. But when we did the business cards, they tried to [unclear] the union was against it. They wanted—if there was going to be business cards for the executives of the components—they wanted Component 12 to lead the way. We said that would be fine, but let's get it done. They fiddled around for quite a while, and we just said, 'That's it.' So, we got our own. That made a little bit of an uproar because it was the same kind of card— looked the same—as the staff rep people. They got new cards, and finally other components did that.

RM [00:17:06] Russ, I'm going to stop you here. I want to go back a bit.

RL [00:17:08] Alright.

RM [00:17:09] So, when you joined BC government, you know, became an employee, it was the BC Government Employees' Association with that—

RL [00:17:17] That's right.

RM [00:17:18] Ed O'Connor or somebody like that. What was his name?

RL [00:17:20] I have no idea because I didn't know—

RM [00:17:23] Oh, no, Fryer had taken over at that point, I think.

RL [00:17:25] I think he came in around '73, didn't he?

RM [00:17:29] He was earlier than that because he drove Wacky Bennett crazy with all his stunts about getting collective bargaining and stuff.

RL [00:17:36] Well, I didn't know John then.

RM [00:17:37] Yeah. But just—that was my question. The difference between being part of the BC Government Employees' Association and then when the NDP got in 1972 and gave you bargaining unit rights and allowed you to form a union, I mean, how did that change things?

RL [00:17:58] Well, after our first contract, my salary went up about 40 percent. In those days, Wacky used to make a big grandstand deal, and say 'We're giving an increase of whatever it is to these group of people.' It wasn't over the board. It was selected.

RM [00:18:16] At around Christmas.

RL [00:18:19] Right. You know, it was complete B.S., actually. It was just a photo op for him.

RM [00:18:25] There was no bargaining.

RL [00:18:26] Nope. And, it was just, it was like he was a big shot because he's given the gift, right? The association at the time was nothing more, like I said, than an agent for social things, for the members. As you saw or as you heard me say, they were ineffective at representing the members. That's why when those three things happened to me, I said, 'That's it. I have to get involved because these guys aren't doing it.' Right away, now, we were drawn into this thing by Ed Honcharuk and Tom MacKay to get rid of these other guys because they were having problems with them because they're the same as Adam and I. We were doing things for our members. They didn't. We were too fast for them.

RM [00:19:17] But it was a sea change for the government employees, wasn't it? The union finally—

RL [00:19:22] Oh, completely. But members, you know, they were a little reluctant at first, the beginning.

RM [00:19:27] That's right. The first vote, I think, was against calling themselves a union.

RL [00:19:32] (laughter) Yeah. What happened? I can't—like I said earlier, my dating isn't really wonderful.

RM [00:19:39] You're okay.

RL [00:19:39] But what happened during that time was we started doing things that was for our members, and we were doing our best. At the same time, you know, when I finally got on to the provincial executive, that's a story. I was—how did this work? Joanne Fox and I were running for regional vice presidents. Adam was going to run for vice president. He was the component chair. If he won, I would—I was almost guaranteed to become the chair. So—but I couldn't be sure that he was going to win. So, I was running against Joanne. Now Joanne is a friend, and there was no animosity there, but amongst John Shield's friends, they didn't like Adam and I.

RM [00:20:43] Was John Shields involved then? Wasn't that—

RL [00:20:46] I've jumped ahead, you know.

RM [00:20:48] So, we're talking what—the 1980s?

RL [00:20:52] '85, I think.

RM [00:20:52] Oh, wow, what happened to all those ten years before?

RL [00:20:55] Oh, okay. Well, let me look at my notes. Okay? (laughter)

RM [00:20:59] Tell me something. Why don't you just talk? What did you think of John Fryer?

RL [00:21:03] He was my hero.

RM [00:21:05] In what ways?

RL [00:21:06] Well, because he created our union. He set up the, you know, the component system which gave autonomy to people who really needed specialized consideration of their type of work. He and Norm Richards were a working team. I was in awe of both of them, being—I'm almost crying. I didn't know them then, and—but I saw what they were doing. And so, I was—you know, I wanted to do whatever I could. Now, what happened early, though, we kind of get into these politics of the union. They came to Adam and I and, a woman in Component 12, but I can't, I'm sorry, I can't remember her name, and said we'd like you guys to run against the old boys association group.

RM [00:22:17] Was this after Fryer?

RL [00:22:19] Fryer was here. I mean, you know, this is when the union is formed. Now we're—

RM [00:22:23] Right at the beginning of 1973, '74.

RL [00:22:26] Yeah. Well, probably a year later, probably '74 or 5 in that area.

RM [00:22:32] After you got your first contract, that wonderful first contract.

RL [00:22:36] Well, yeah, but also—

RM [00:22:38] A 40 percent raise.

RL [00:22:41] Like I said, because I can't juggle the actual dates, I can tell you things that happened. So, they came to us and said (Ed Honcharuk again and Norm), and said, 'We'd like you to, the three of you, to run for the Community Services Fund and get rid of those, the old boys club from it.' (laughter) So, we said, 'Okay.' So, we ran, and we won, and they were gone. We found that when we were in there, the payroll deduction was limited. There's only several things you can give to. They said, 'Well, that's because the computer won't allow it. We don't have the capacity.' 'Okay,' we said, 'Well, we're going to change things.' Because right now you got all these big things, United Way and the Heart and, you know, and they used a lot of their money that they collect to get the money that they collect. I think that United Way, the Timmy's fund or whatever, was spending like 75 percent of what they took in to gain it. So, we said, 'Well, that's wrong.' So, we had a rule. Anybody that we would put on to the payroll detection plan had to spend 10 percent or

less, for administration. Then we found that the computers actually would allow us to add, so we started adding a bunch of people. We knocked the United Way off.

RM [00:24:16] Wow.

RL [00:24:18] We had a lot of small ones, you know, like halfway houses for women—

RM [00:24:22] Kool Aid?

RL [00:24:24] Those small ones, right, that would that were doing it. The other rule was they couldn't be duplicating something that's already being done.

RM [00:24:33] Was this a full time job?

RM [00:24:34] No, this is just volunteer. Like, we would be booked off. Like, when we got going, we went from kinda hardly anything being donated to, like— I don't, I can't remember—but ten times as much in the first year, but it was only Victoria. Then it spread all around the province until we were making thousands and thousands. People got the opportunity to pick where their money went, how much of it went. If they didn't have a choice, we would say, well, the average of what everybody's giving to all of these will be split up with your donation and go to each of them.

RM [00:25:13] What a good thing to do.

RL [00:25:14] So, we did that. Now, to help doing that I was booked off for two weeks. I made a slide presentation. Went around to all the offices in Victoria. We brought everybody off the job and showed them this 20 minute tape or whatever it was, you know, and got them to sign up. So, I was kind of proud of that. You know, that was the first thing I had actually produced. I was at a meeting with Norm and John and, we showed it, and I noticed Norm wasn't that happy looking at it. I said, 'Well, what's the skinny here, Norm? I thought that we did a great job.' He said, 'Well, you weren't supposed to. (laughter) The BC Fed supports the United Way.'

RM [00:26:02] Which is absolutely true. So, you got a representative, a full time representative.

RL [00:26:06] I said, 'You should have told us that because, you see, if you send us in there to get rid of those guys, we did. We saw that the thing wasn't working very well, we fixed it. So you can't do that to us. If you want us to do something, you have to tell us what it is. Because we don't know about the politics of the other unions and what you're doing.' So, he didn't have an answer, but I, as a result of that, I left that committee.

RM [00:26:35] We should point out at this point for those that may not know, Norm Richards was the elected president of the BCGEU, and John Fryer was the secretary, business—whatever his title was—the full time executive person. Norm was the president, right?

RL [00:26:54] My understanding was that the BCGEU took over John's union, John Shield's union, and part of the deal when they took it over, you know, absorbed it, their members, John was given the position.

RM [00:27:14] I'm talking about Fryer.

RL [00:27:16] Oh. John Fryer was general secretary.

RM [00:27:18] That was the title.

RL [00:27:19] Okay.

RM [00:27:20] Talk about Norm and John Fryer.

RL [00:27:22] Okay. They were the team.

RM [00:27:23] Yeah. That's right.

RL [00:27:24] John Shields was there as—because he had been president of his smaller union.

RM [00:27:29] Yeah. The Social Service or whatever it was called.

RL [00:27:31] Yeah, that's right. But they didn't want him. They never wanted John Shields, but that was the deal. They had to take him along with the members. So, they did. But there was always kind of an underlying, I don't know what you call it. Not exactly animosity, but, you know, they weren't comrades. (laughter) That didn't show up to me until later because I didn't realize at the time what was happening. Meanwhile, back in our local, we were doing all kinds of other things like—I was involved with—with Adam and Ed—they had, we had a one day walk out (like half a day) and the idea was our members would walk off the job starting at a certain time.

RM [00:28:30] What was the issue?

RL [00:28:31] I can't remember. (laughter)

RM [00:28:33] But it was a good one!

RL [00:28:34] Yeah. Well, you know, this is the first—the government kind of never realized that our members would walk off.

RM [00:28:43] Because it was illegal.

RL [00:28:44] So, we walked off, and the idea was to get the people down in the Douglas building and that area, (the old semi-permanent buildings down there) to walk off and start walking up Government Street, and then on to Douglas, and up to the Memorial Arena. As they came, as they passed all other offices of the government, one-by-one, those offices would join until you got this huge crowd arriving at the arena, which we had. That's where my involvement had been in setting up in the interior with John and Adam and a couple of others. And, then Norm Richards and John Fryer spoke to the assembled people. That was the first time that the union, I mean, the union took real action against the government. Well, the strike started to loom eventually. Right. Adam and I realized, well, our stewards aren't ready for a strike. They won't know how to be picket captains or do anything or even sign up a member to, you know, whatever, to get strike pay. So, we booked our stewards off for half a day. Two days in a row. We had enough stewards to do it twice, and we taught them whatever we could. Adam was, you know, in this structure, in, I think—what was he—emergency preparedness. He worked for PEP, you know,

Provincial Emergency Program. So, we did that, and that was the first time any of the stewards have been booked off. Now, right away, going back a bit, Adam and I, when we were in the local executive, we were booked off for a week, well we weren't booked off—it was a weekend. Bob Moore, who was the—

RM [00:30:44] I remember Bob Moore.

RL [00:30:44] Yeah, he was the educational officer, and he presented at S.J. Willis School. We went up there for Saturday and Sunday, and he put on the course. You know, kind of introduction to unionism for executive people. After it, we were asked to do a critique. So, we did. He didn't like it. Neither did anybody else, (laughter) but you see, Adam being an instructor, realized that it wasn't a very good presentation. The stuff that was given to us to learn, with the exception of maybe the film that was shown about union problems in the past, you know, where they're being gassed and shot and everything for protesting in the States, was really not very helpful. It didn't give us what we needed. When we gave that critique, we immediately became the enemy of Bob. These other people thought we had it out for Bob, but we didn't. We just said this—'You asked us what we thought. We told you.' You know. (laughter) That kind of put us in this position of being, you said, a troublemaker, but we thought we were doing what was right. During that time, that kind of that concept of us being some kind of outlaws we fostered, actually, because we said, 'Well, we want to be the people who are doing things that are recognized as being leading.' It was because we were always leading that they didn't like it because they wanted to lead, and especially they wanted Component 12 to be recognized as in the leadership.

RM [00:32:38] Did that include John Fryer, or he'd gone by then?

RL [00:32:41] No, we're still—this is earlier than that. This is like right at the beginning again. And he—

RM [00:32:47] Because Fryer didn't like a lot of dissent.

RL [00:32:50] No. Well, we—

RM [00:32:51] You disagree with me?

RL [00:32:52] Well, we're running into John.

RM [00:32:55] John Fryer?

RL [00:32:55] Yes.

RM [00:32:56] Not John Shields.

RL [00:32:58] John Fryer, when we—because John had handpicked all his staff people, and they were all, you know, a group that was including Ed Honcharuk who I used to say we had a love-hate relationship with him because we really appreciated his knowledge and ability to do things, and negotiate, but we didn't like it that he was trying to control our component. We started doing other things. We created the Union Observer course, which is now kind of standardized, I think, if it's still here. I haven't been around for so long. That allowed people to have a union representative sit in on interviews when they were applying for a job.

RM [00:33:48] That was you guys that pioneered that?

RL [00:33:51] We did it first. First time. Adam and I. Then we also did—I did one that was a wills week. We got three lawyers to donate their time basically and give our members a simple will (man and wife type deal) for 20 bucks. Then we ran that for a week. We put a couple hundred people through, I think, I can't remember how many. We did these various courses and, just trying to—I have to look at my notes just to see—

RM [00:34:34] We don't need too much detail Russ.

RL [00:34:35] Okay.

RM [00:34:36] I mean, you're not writing a thesis here.

RL [00:34:38] Okay.

RM [00:34:38] We're just talking.

RL [00:34:39] Sure. Well, we also did a financial, you know, planning course for our members and a variety of things.

RM [00:34:53] These things were appreciated were they not even by the leadership?

RL [00:34:57] Not initially, because they always thought that we were doing it to spite Bob because he was the official education officer. But in our minds, they weren't (the union, through him) were not giving what was needed to the members. There is lots of people going to Harrison Hot Springs, lots of women being booked off for women's issues. But we saw it as— it's always the same five or six women going to everything. That's not how you do it, right? Those people have to come back and recruit others for the cause. And then our component, it was only five percent women, but they got the same as all the men did, and they were accepted as women doing that job. They were getting the money for the job, whereas Component 12 was like a woman's ghetto where, they were getting lower pay, especially on entry level. I think I gave you an example where I had six months of drafting. I'd come in and they put me in as a draftsman one six because I had a couple years in forestry doing some drafting. A woman like my wife, for example, typing at 120 or a shorthand at 120, typing at 100, bookkeeping, all kinds of stuff, runs the whole office, is hired at the lowest level and takes six years to get to where I was. Just completely wrong. As a result of realizing that they had this endless apprenticeship six steps, six steps, a little overlap, two steps, and you kept going up the ladder where it should have been one pay for the job. We managed over the years to get down to three steps, but I understand that that went back up later. I'm not sure I haven't seen any agreements. The whole concept was that we were always cognizant of not only men, but women too. We were wanting to help, but we were being kind of stopped from doing anything for whatever internal problems the union was having.

RM [00:37:12] You know, it's interesting what, the way you're talking is. You know, the public has this idea that unions are these monoliths, and everybody just follows the leader and there's no democracy within the union. What you're talking about is, I mean, it's not that abnormal within unions, that there are disagreements—

RL [00:37:30] Of course.

RM [00:37:31] And personality conflicts, and this is part of the functioning of a union isn't it? Nothing tidy wrapped.

RL [00:37:40] It's like in real politics, you know outside unions, just people run. My belief is just about everybody who runs, who wants to do it because they want to make a change for the better. What happens is they get absorbed by the system. They get pressured until they concede. In order to get anything done, they have to agree to do all kinds of other things that they don't want to do.

RM [00:38:03] Compromises.

RL [00:38:04] That's right, and quite often those compromises are worse than saying no. You know what I mean? That's where we came, but we were lucky in my component because everybody in the component was on side with us. It was complete, a complete group—

RM [00:38:24] There was no split within the component? The split was within the overall union.

RL [00:38:28] That's right.

RM [00:38:29] And your component's place in that union?

RL [00:38:31] That's right, and so we gained a reputation. Then what happened was, we did all kinds of stuff. All I can say is we were always doing something ahead of the rest of the union and getting chastised for doing that, and being seen as the guy, you know, look, our Johnny, everybody's out of step except our Johnny. And we were our Johnny, right, (laughter) because we're the ones out of step. But like I say, we were proud to be so because in our minds, we were doing what we were sent there to do—representing our members—where some people were there, you know, they were working, they were up to become staff person. Or other motivations, you know. And—

RM [00:39:22] Did you ever become a staff person?

RL [00:39:24] No. Although I did apply after I—I have to jump ahead a little bit. I was there before. Joanne and I were running. Adam became—he got elected. Joanne beat me by one vote, and that vote was a fellow who changed his mind based on I don't know what, but he said he was going to vote for me, and he didn't. I was thankful that she—because when they realized that Adam got elected, that made me chair. That put me on the provincial executive, and I was the only one on the provincial executive that year who didn't vote for John Shields. Everybody else, including Adam, and during that time, Adam and I couldn't talk to each other about what was happening. We made that agreement because we didn't want to have our friendship interfered with because of politics.

RL [00:40:22] So, you and Adam didn't get along, or at least—

RL [00:40:24] We disagreed.

RM [00:40:25] You got along, but you disagreed.

RL [00:40:27] Well, on who were going to support. I was voting and on the team to elect Daryl Barnett, who later became a staffer.

RM [00:40:38] Why didn't you like John Shields?

RL [00:40:41] Well, I'll come to that. But—

RM [00:40:46] Because lots of people did like John Shields.

RL [00:40:48] Yes, they did. But a lots of people weren't on the inside to see what was happening. Let's see.

RM [00:41:00] You don't have to go into too much detail.

RL [00:41:01] No, I'm just thinking, you know. But I went on so—at the beginning of when I went to provincial executive, I thought, 'Oh, I'm in for it now. I'm the only guy that didn't support John.' But in reality I was accepted, and for the first six months I was there, I thought everything was going great. And everybody was in—

RM [00:41:24] Do you know what year this is or approximately?

RL [00:41:26] Yeah, I think it would be '85.

RM [00:41:29] Eighty-five, okay.

RL [00:41:30] Eighty-four or eighty-five

RM [00:41:30] Yeah, mid eighties.

RL [00:41:31] And so, we went along doing pretty good, but some things happened, that kind of put me off of John. One thing was he used to—some people on the executive was sittin' on the fence and see what was gonna happen, and then they go on the side of the majority. I like to speak out and give my opinion one way or another, and when the vote comes, the vote comes. Right, you know. John's method was to create a consensus. So, you talk to death. What started to put me off at John was, we went to a convention I think it was CLC [Canadian Labour Congress], but I'm not sure. At these conventions, you know, we went to many, many conventions all across Canada. I was fortunate with others to go to all the ten provinces or to—I didn't go to the Northwest Territories at that time, but all the provinces, and see Canada and meet a lot of other union people. At this one, it was the coal miners in Britain were on strike and they had—

RM [00:42:47] Yup, 1984.

RL [00:42:48] And they had to the deal where it was called 'Dig Deep.'

RM [00:42:53] Yup, for the coal miners.

RL [00:42:54] Right, and they pass the hat, and everybody throws in 10, 20 bucks, whatever. John put in whatever he had, I think it was ten bucks, but he claimed it on his expense sheet, (laughter) and Adam knew that because he was checking the expenses. So, in the back of my mind, I'm thinking, 'Well, that's not right. People don't do that.' In my component, we tried—we had Badge Morrison—Don Morrison was our treasurer. He made sure every damn thing that was spent was needed.

RM [00:43:27] Did you ever call John Shields on it?

RL [00:43:30] Later. Sure.

RM [00:43:32] On that—

RL [00:43:32] On that particular thing. No, because I didn't actually see the thing. I'm taking Adam's, you know, second hand thing, but it affected me in and what was up. What did really put me off was we were in bargaining on two occasions. Well, three. On one occasion, Cliff and he went off—.

RM [00:43:57] Cliff Anstein?

RM [00:43:58] Yes—went off with the employer while the rest of the committee sat playing cards and games, and they'd come back and give a report, and then we'd kind of go through it all. Eventually, they came in one day and said, 'We have an agreement.' That agreement, they, we were given a kind of handout to read it. We went through the whole thing. Everything seems okay. We're supposed to go to a designated places throughout the province to convince our members to vote for it.

RM [00:44:42] Ratification.

RL [00:44:43] Yeah. I suggested to John that he go on the radio and tell the people that he's going to address our union members on TV and that he should get the employer, the government, to pay for it and to arrange it. The rest of the executive laughed at me, but John saw the value of that, and he made that arrangement, and he went on. So, our members saw him give the presentation. The next morning—and we're going to go out, you see, sell the contract. The next morning, we kind of convened again, and were actually given the printed things to go through. Randy, what's Randy's name? I mentioned it earlier. Pearson.

RM [00:45:48] Okay.

RM [00:45:49] So, Randy Pearson was the chairperson of the Component 6, was it, the Liquor Board. He's reading through it along with the rest of us, and then he says, 'What's this?' It's a scab amnesty clause that says that people who crossed the line weren't going to be chastised, and he was furious. We had a vote on that. We started talking about it. We'd already voted to accept the contract. He said, 'This wasn't here yesterday when we voted. John Shields says, 'You voted to accept the agreement.' Right then I said, 'What a scoundrel this guy is, he makes a deal, sells it to us, but it's not at all there when he shows it to us. Now he's saying that we voted for it.' So, at that meeting he got up after a few minutes, left the room. The meeting never concluded. It was never, you know, we just drifted away because each of us was supposed to go out and see our people at designated areas. I was going out to, where was I going? Nootka, up in the Interior. I had been there before, kind of flew in a little plane, landed in a grass field, and I had told them that I was going to go to jail to get a good contract. They said, 'Why aren't you in jail?' (laughter).

RM [00:47:18] Good question.

RL [00:47:19] I said, 'Because we were betrayed by your president.' I said, 'My advice is vote against the contract. I can't because I've already voted to support it, but I'm telling you

to vote against it.' But it passed. So, that happened. Another time when we were bargaining—well, the one difference between my component and others once I became the chair, then I did the negotiation, and the staff rep assisted me. All the other components used the staff rep, it was the reverse. We had the beginning of a great contract because it was going to give us all the ETO [earned time off] that you had, which could be 250 hours to be used to supplement your sick leave. Which means that you could go for six months or something, without losing any salary. So anyway, we had that. But Component 12 made a deal with Joy McPhail, similar, except they were limited to seven days. Once the employer saw that they went for seven days, we were limited to seven. I think it was Ron. I forgot his name. Ron, the negotiator for the employer, says, 'Well, we can't give you more than Component 12.' I went to Shields. Now, before that, this is where this tape went, where he said, 'We're right behind you.' If we want something, 'you come to me, and we'll do it' and everything. Well, I went to him, and I said, 'You know, basically I wanted Joy McPhail fired for making that deal because the concept of component bargaining then—and was said over and over—is you don't make deals that are going to affect the other components until you talk to them.'

RM [00:49:24] How does Joy MacPhail fit into all this?

RL [00:49:26] She was a staff person who was—

RM [00:49:30] She was—was she with the BCGEU?

RL [00:49:32] Yes.

RM [00:49:33] I thought she was just with the BC Fed [BC Federation of Labour].

RM [00:49:35] No, she was BCGEU.

RM [00:49:36] At one point. Okay. Yup.

RL [00:49:42] I went back, and I said, 'Well, look, we're not doing too swell here because now you're telling me we're limited. We have to get—let's keep going. So, we were negotiating and negotiating. Then they get a note. Everybody has to report to the hall over at headquarters. John Shields got a press conference. So, we walk in and John Shields is signing the master agreement, and all the component agreements are stopped. But we haven't finished negotiating. We haven't talked. I'm talking to Ron (my opposite number) and say, 'Well, what are we going to do?' He says, 'I don't know Russ, what are you going to do?' I said, 'Well, look, we have four outstanding issues. Let's say that we get two of them. You give us two and we'll say, that's all right, because we're not going to get everything.' He said, 'Well, which ones do you want?' I said, 'Well, you know, they're all the same to us. Our component sees these four things that are outstanding as secondary, and each one is the same', you know. He said, 'Okay, how about this and this.' I said, 'That's fine. We'll take that.' So, we sign. That was it, but I was so mad because we had lost that ability to upgrade. Then another time we were in negotiations, and we all went to the hotel where we were sitting around. John and Cliff take off. We never see them again, kind of thing. They come back and said, 'We've got a contract.' That's why I was against him, because, well, he's doing the same thing. They always have these rooms where they have all kinds of liquor and all this kind of stuff—\$800 lunches. Well, that's not the way we do things in my component. We used to do things like we got a stip [stipend] like 30 bucks a day or something for food. We all chip that in, and then we went for Chinese dinner where

they kept on bringing in until the money ran out because we didn't want to cause any anything else. Right. You know what I mean? No extra expense. People were just—

RM [00:51:55] Russ, I want to ask you about a time that was an amazing time for all of British Columbia and including people in the B.C. Government Employees Union. You knew were on the front lines. It was Operation Solidarity in 1983. I think—I mean, what was your experience? I mean, that was just an amazing time. We almost had a general strike in this province. So, how did it look from where you were because the BCGEU went out on strike. They were on strike—on a legal strike on Halloween. Midnight. Do you want to talk about that?

RL [00:52:29] My recollection of Operation Solidarity is limited, and I don't know why. I was directly involved, active in the strike, but my memory of it, it just kind of blends in with everything else. I remember, like, I was talking to Ed Honcharuk again, and he was assigned to get the little pins, their little rectangles. There was one for the BC Fed, which was red, and then other components got different colors. They would say the BCGEU or whatever on it, Operation Solidarnosc. I remember going to Ed's house, and we were looking at these pins because he had gotten a whole collection of them made as examples. He had kept the prototypes, and we were into kind of doing all kinds of preparations and everything. But, you know, we went to some rallies, and we walked up the street and, you know what I mean? It was just a bustle of things, but I wasn't involved directly with any kind of negotiations, or talks—

RM [00:53:48] Do you remember the spirit of the membership?

RL [00:53:49] Oh, yeah. It was good. I mean, you know, it was one of those things that I think now the same thing is happening with people recognizing the Ukraine as (well it's not 'the' Ukraine), Ukraine has been of universal interest to be sure that the right thing happens. And I think that's what we were saying. The right thing has to happen in Poland.

RM [00:54:23] Well, in Poland, but you called yourself Operation Solidarity. But we had our own Operation Solidarity in B.C.

RL [00:54:27] Oh, yes. Yes, but—

RM [00:54:30] It was Art Kube that took the name from Poland.

RL [00:54:32] Oh, yeah. Well, I know that when we went to convention and there was a big backlash at that time. I wasn't into the politics of the inter union stuff, but Jack Munro was under fire.

RM [00:54:51] Yes, he was.

RL [00:54:52] I remember walking up—we had had a big conference, and, you know, there's the politics of who we're going to support and why. They have a little thing, and Norm and John Fryer talk to us about how we're going to vote and what we're going to do. The IWA [International Woodworkers of America] was kind of on the skids with us at the time.

RM [00:55:17] That's right, that's right.

RL [00:55:19] I remember going up the elevator behind Jack and I said, you know, Jack turned around, he saw me, and I said, 'What's the matter, Jack? Are you hearing footsteps?' (laughter) Because he was under fire, you know.

RM [00:55:32] He was. In fact, you voted against him for first vice-president and elected Art Gruntman.

RL [00:55:38] So, you know, and then of course, Art went up to see the premier, I guess.

RM [00:55:50] No, it was Jack that went to see the premier.

RM [00:55:50] Oh, Jack. No. Art was there wasn't he?

RM [00:55:53] Art was home sick.

RL [00:55:55] Oh, was he?

RM [00:55:56] He got pneumonia.

RL [00:55:57] Didn't want to go, eh? (laughter)

RM [00:56:01] Well, they put that on him.

RL [00:56:01] Okay, but that deal that the IWA—that Jack made wasn't a good one. Right? And—

RM [00:56:06] A lot of people said that.

RL [00:56:07] Yeah, I think that there was quite a backlash.

RM [00:56:12] But you guys got a good deal.

RL [00:56:15] Yeah. Well.

RM [00:56:18] Considering what was on the table before.

RL [00:56:21] Yes. Things—I mean, during that first few years, it was wonderful being in on all that, you know, the strikes and things. I forgot to say that in negotiations, our component was having problems, or a section of our component was having problems, and it was the pilots and the aircrew, and they weren't getting anywhere. We tried to get them new language and the government wasn't having it. This was the same, in the same year that Component 12 had Keep on Bugging. They had little ladybugs with BCGEU on them that was their little thing they were doing. We were negotiating at the old, what we called the bunker, you know, the old that BC Electric Building on Bay Street. The pilots told us we've got to give them something. We said to them (Ed was negotiating for us) said—this is when Adam was chair—said, 'Our guys are really upset, you know. They're on the verge of striking.' 'No way. They would never strike. Government employees don't strike.' But an hour later, there's a phone call. Ron's called out, comes back: Pilots have wildcatted. (laughter) We were the first component to actually go on strike as a component.

RM [00:58:04] Wow. That's pretty historic.

RM [00:58:06] Well, remember how, like you say that we're always kind of one step ahead. Meanwhile, we kind of got that worked out and we got them the language. Now, during the break, I had taken one of those ladybugs and they—I kind of made a little tack on it, and they stuck it underneath the table where Ron was sitting. (laughter) Ron Meyer. I said something—he said something. I said, 'Oh, yeah, it's good thing we got this recorded.' He said, 'What do you mean?' You know, he jumps up. (laughter) 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Oh, I have the place bugged.' (laughter) He said, 'What? You're kidding. No, you're not doing that.' I said, 'Sure, I am. It's right there underneath your— (laughter). And he says, 'No way.' Then he starts doing this. [RL slides slowly down his chair] And then he gets out of his chair. He goes under. He says, 'I see it, I see it!' (laughter) and he kind of pries it off. He comes up and he's looking at the component 12 bug.

RM [00:59:05] (laughter) Funny. That was pretty funny. Well you can have a good time too, eh? Even when it's ultra tense and so on.

RL [00:59:10] He wasn't such a bad guy. Yeah.

RM [00:59:13] There was the big election for president, I guess when you tried to vote out John Shields.

RL [00:59:21] Right.

RM [00:59:22] Was that pretty bitter?

RL [00:59:26] From the other side? I would think so.

RM [00:59:28] Yeah.

RL [00:59:31] What happened—there was another strike. It was the projectionists.

RM [00:59:38] Yes, I remember that.

RL [00:59:40] Okay.

RM [00:59:41] Trying to take their jobs.

RL [00:59:43] So, on one night—so we would go down and march on the street with them. I used to go to the Capitol Theatre, which is diagonally across from the Odeon. One night, John and Marilyn, or his first, I forgot her first name. I thought it was Marilyn, but his first wife, walked down the street and went into the Odeon on a complimentary pass. It's when our guys are across the street, and so there's a big backlash against that. At around that time, there was this thing developed amongst protesters, you know, that were—what had happened by this time that this happened was there's about seven people, including myself, Adam and the regional vice presidents, who were discontented with the way things were going and, other chairs as well and people. There was a faction, let's say, of people didn't like what was happening. When that happened, they kind of rebelled. Now, at the same time, there was this other smaller group within the protesting group that called themselves the Dread Poets Society. They were making attacks not only on John, but, you know, about the whole problem of the provincial executive spending money where it wasn't helping and doing various things. Whatever they did that they didn't like they'd write poems and send out pictures. I brought you a couple to show and they would mail them out.

Eventually, I knew some of them, and in fact I did one, one thing myself. And that has to do with this, because this to me was kind of a culminating event when the president of the union walks past the picket line and goes to a movie provided free for by the employer, when the—who are running the theatre with scabs. You know, it's just beyond me. I was sworn to secrecy at the time as to who they were, but I never knew all of them, but there were some around that I knew. When that happened, there was that backlash, but it was only amongst that group because outside of the executive and insiders in the union, no one knew what was what John was up to in these various things. I'm just kinda giving you the odd thing. But Randy— no— oh, yeah. Remember, I told you Randy was upset about the scab amnesty clause. Then these guys, the projectionist rep said. So, then there's a backlash from the Dread Poets Society, and Adam and I were accused without any reason, except we were Component 11 (laughter)—.

RM [01:03:00] Troublemakers.

RL [01:03:00] You know, as being the only two members in the group. Well, of course, that wasn't true. Like I say, I did do some contributions so I could be said to be amongst them, but, when the people didn't pursue John on that, but my component did at one of our meetings and the staff rep was there, (I forgot who it was) there was a motion made to have him resign and to hold a special convention to elect a new president. The vote—I can't remember how many was in our component, but there was only one abstention—one person didn't vote in favor of that. So, I put the motion. They voted on it. I sent it up in the mail, down the hall to the mail room. We came back, and we had another discussion about it. As a result of that discussion, we said, maybe it's not fair to do this, like, demand his resignation without listening to what he might have to say. So, the chair, I mean, the exec said, 'Okay, well, get him down here'. I went down the hall, and retracted the mail, and I went upstairs to see John. I said, 'John, I'm here to tell you this is the story.' Well, he was outraged. I said, 'Well, we're going to give you an opportunity to speak to us, but this motion is passed. It would have to be a motion reconsideration if you can convince anybody, but I didn't want to do it without you having an opportunity and neither did the others. Then he got mad at the staff rep for not telling him what had happened because he was there, but he didn't tell John. He came down, and he addressed us, and after he explained his position, and then after that a vote was taken, and it was reversed exactly. There's one abstention who didn't vote to allow him get off the hook. After that, and I think that is when the election that you're talking about came about. What happened was our component was still upset with him, and we thought that somebody should run against him. Wayne Mowat was thinking about it, and so he declared. Adam said, 'Well, I'm going to run.' Just to us. The next day he put his name forward. I can't remember who nominated him or anything. So, then they had, there's a lot of discussion scurrying around with everything, you know.

RM [01:06:02] It was pretty bitter, wasn't it?

RL [01:06:04] Well, it'd be bitter from John's side. I don't think that we were particularly bitter. I think that we just saw an opportunity to have him exchanged for somebody else and including, like, either Mowat or Ustik. Our component, like I told you earlier, was very tight. They all supported Adam. In the first vote, Adam had more votes than John, and Wayne didn't have enough votes to remain. He dropped out, but the other two ran again. During the interim, they sent a bunch of people around to hold hastily convened meetings with the locals. All the staff were pressuring, and then they had a discussion on the stage where each candidate got to speak. It was during that that speech where Adam said, there

will be blood in his street, and I think that really scared the Component 12 people because, you know—.

RM [01:07:09] I can see why.

RL [01:07:11] Yeah. On the other hand, when we heard that, that's just Adam. (laughter) You know.

RM [01:07:16] He was a colorful guy.

RL [01:07:17] Oh, yeah. Yes, very. Yeah. I mean, I took that with a grain of salt. That's just the way he talked. I remember one time, you see, he had been in the Communist Party when he was younger. Then he rebelled against them because he kind of saw that they were what they were, and he became really against them. Anytime he could even speak out against them. At that same convention where Jack went up, he attended a meeting and called out the communist agitators within one of the other unions. 'You don't have to tell me who they are. I can smell them.' (laughter) That kind of stuff, you know.

RM [01:08:02] We were talking a lot about the internal, you know, the dissension within the union, but, I mean, a union isn't to have that. A union is to take on the employers.

RL [01:08:13] Yes, that's right.

RM [01:08:16] Were you good at that?

RL [01:08:17] I thought so. Hours of work was my forte. We created within highways an hours of work form. I think I talked about this. Fifteen months. Every individual had their own hours of work form. They would fill it out in conjunction with their supervisor, and it was signed off by the director, you know the higher official. It showed you all the time—what days they're going to work, how long they work on those days, when they took their vacation, when they schedule their ETO, and everything that had to do with it. It was signed off, and that showed you what they're going to do within the year. Right? So, then it was sent up to payroll. In my own area there was like 50 people.

RM [01:09:09] Why was that better?

RL [01:09:11] Because the hours of work language has so many variations that you could do, and the work is so varied that when you go out in the field, it was advantageous to both sides. For example, if you were sent over to somewhere in the Lower Mainland to do something and the weekend is coming up, you finish your day at, say 4:00 o'clock, but you can't get a ferry back, right? So, you stay over. Now if you stay over, you get a weekend there and you come back at lunchtime on Monday. So—but most people would say, well, 'I just have to get the ferry. I'll arrive late at night, but I'm home with my family on the weekend.' I would say, 'Call your family, get them on the boat. You pick them up, and they can spend the weekend with you on the Lower Mainland.' Right. It will cost the employer because they won't pay you overtime. But if you're on flex time or a varied hours of work, then you can have longer days, and you can get more done. If you have pure flex time, you can get all your work done, come home on Thursday.

RM [01:10:36] This was really great for the workers.

RL [01:10:38] Oh, wonderful. I believe that we had the best hours of work language in the world. I've spoken to some unionists in the States. They wouldn't believe me when I told them what could be done. During that time, and you talk about negotiating, we got that as the official Ministry of Highways method of keeping track of people's work. It was also picked up by other ministries, especially in Victoria, because I used to go around to every ministry office and with the stewards, we'd work it out. It became not universal, but it was used a lot. When I left, I don't know what happened because I was stuck in this—

RM [01:11:26] (laughter) Lots of things happened. It was easier for—within the union, I guess.

RM [01:11:29] I don't know because what happened, somebody I was just talking to upstairs said, 'Oh, I was telling him a similar story'. He said, 'Well, that was the black book, right?' I said, 'No, I never heard of the black book.' I was—that was 22 years ago when I left, and he said, well, this happened. So, I said, well, yeah, but that's what we were doing then, you know, it was agreed to by the Ministry of Highways especially. It was really wonderful for individuals because they could pick their starting and finishing time. The length of their lunch time, what shift they would work, what multiples of the shift—

RM [01:12:07] Early flex time way before COVID.

RL [01:12:10] Oh, sure. I had two guys in my office. We called them the mountain men because they always like to go hunting and fishing. One of them lived on Saltspring. The two of them were the only ones in my office who were on pure flex time, but their job was designing, doing various designs on the computer, and they set it all up, and then they had to wait. So, they'd come in, they'd work and work and then get it set up and they leave. They come back tomorrow or maybe the next day, because all they had to do is put in 70 hours in two weeks and produce the product. The employer was quite happy with their work because they were doing good work. Right. They were off doing whatever the hell they wanted. When it came time—later, I was supposed to I wasn't ready to resign and, go, you know, like to retire this in my final days. They said I am redundant, and I said, 'Fine, give me a job.' They couldn't find a job they were wanting to give me. I said, 'Well, if you can't give me a job, buy me out. I was on the Article 13 committee. Placing these people who were being—so they couldn't come up with—they didn't want to pay me out. They just didn't know what the hell to do, so I stayed on for an extra year. Placing people on article that became my job. I was never at work. I was always off on Article 13, and finally they gave me a job. They, but they said, 'Well, it's not really what you want.' They bought me out for a year's salary, or whatever it was at the time.

RM [01:13:58] I had the same thing happen to me. My wife said it was like winning the MacArthur Genius Grant. You get a year's pay for doing nothing. (laughter)

RL [01:14:07] Right. At the end though, these two guys that were—they became redundant. I had to place them with the management's representative. I had a really good association with personnel office. We always worked stuff out. He—these two guys were, like I said, the mountain men. I got them jobs that they adored as, like, park rangers. One of them was up at the Stamp, not Stamp Falls. It's Skutz Falls on the, by Cowichan Lake. He got in there it—

RM [01:14:51] Dream job.

RL [01:14:52] Exactly. He was only there for about three or four months, and he saved a fellow from drowning who had been fly fishing. He had these waders, and he went in too deep, and they filled up, and he was drowning, and he jumped in and saved him. It's fortuitous that that happened.

RM [01:15:12] If one thing hadn't led to another, that guy might have drowned.

RL [01:15:14] That's right. Yeah. He was happy. The guy was happy. Everyone's happy. That was a good story that came out of Article 13.

RM [01:15:25] Russ, a lifetime in the union, you know, I mean, you must look back on it with a lot of pride and so on. Ups and downs. I mean, what do you take back. What do you take from it when you look back?

RL [01:15:39] Well, I have a certain amount of pride in the language that I developed for our component. I wrote a lot of what we got. At the same time, I look with regret that there were some ideas that I had that were never picked up. I think that it would have been much better if we had. The interrelationship with all the people that I had, as friends and associates in the union, whether we had these petty things or not, they were great friendships. There aren't too many left now, so I miss that. I miss the excitement of being involved in all these little things. I chuckle to myself when I think of some of the things. There was one campaign the government took on when we were negotiating, and we used to have a sign out on the highway, where Mitchell's farm is just beyond that. It was a noticeboard about this, you know, big [motions with his arms] and on the—it's kind of like "We're working for you," and doing all these things. Somebody would write across it, 'Fire them all.' So, Ed came to me and said, 'We're going to do something.' This is—so why don't you do this. I got Joe Brady from the Liquor Board and Bill Lyons from my component, a lifelong friend who I met up in the union. We went over to their building, the bunker, in the middle of the night. I had written a little letter to them saying, you know, we're bargaining and we're doing this, and you're not doing this, and maybe if we'd done something, this would work it. I went to the door, and I made a big noise and had this in case the, you know, the security guys are going to be around, and no one came so I slipped it in the door. Meanwhile, the other two guys painted across the top of their building in great big letter, 'Fire them all.' (laughter) That was the last time I saw that being done. They never wrote it again. We had to get the thing painted all the time.

RM [01:18:07] Had you known that they had done it?

RL [01:18:10] Doesn't matter. Their supporters were doing that. It's kind of like I have signs—

RM [01:18:18] Gotta. Yup.

RL [01:18:18] I have some signs out in front of my house, NDP sign, and they're getting knocked down. I went out one night. There's these guys in suits (laughter) ripping down the sign. I always thought it'd be, you know—

RM [01:18:33] Ruffians?

RL [01:18:33] Yeah, ruffians. No, four guys in a big car with suits on. Anyway, the thing is, it worked. (laughter) We always call that dirty tricks, you know. Nothing really bad, but. Yeah.

RM [01:18:51] Kept things going. All right. This is great. Anything else?

RL [01:18:55] Well, I don't know, things that were—I had a whole bunch of stuff.

RM [01:18:59] We don't want everything.

RL [01:19:02] I know. Some of the— like I was also area vice president. I enjoyed that. That was social aspect, Labour Day picnics. That was another thing that John did that I didn't like. You know, all these little things build up when you're working with people and they keep irritating you, stopping you from doing stuff. And I was getting a Labour Day picnic going.

RM [01:19:32] Yeah, I loved Labour Day picnics.

RL [01:19:34] I had it all arranged because I was in charge out in Sooke on the flats. He said, 'Well, it looks like it's going to rain, so we're going to cancel.' I said, 'You don't cancel. This is Labour Day! You know, we'll tough it out.'

RM [01:19:46] We're the labor movement!

RL [01:19:47] But he was—he stopped it, and I always said, you know, that's not what you do. So, those things although they seem petty, it built up to a point where I couldn't support him as leader. Yeah. Now, you asked about John Fryer and Norm Richards. I became good friends with them later. I said to John Fryer, 'You know, John, you hired all these guys who you thought were your friends. You thought that Adam and I were against you. We never were.' I said, 'You're not very good judge of character.' He said, 'Yeah, well.' Because a lot of the staff people had turned against him later.

RM [01:20:35] Okay, I'm gonna cut it off there.

RL [01:20:37] Okay.

RM [01:20:38] This was great.