

**Interview: Roger Crowther (RC)**

**Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG)**

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**Transcription: Cathy Walker**

**SG [00:00:06]** Okay. Welcome, Roger. First of all, can you give me your full name, your date of birth and place of birth?

**RC [00:00:13]** My name is Roger Arthur Crowther. I was born in Princeton, B.C., and really raised in Hedley which is 18 miles down the road, back then. In 1947, September the 5th, 1947.

**SG [00:00:31]** I understand that you were from a blended family. That's an interesting thing at that period of time. Can you tell me about that?

**RC [00:00:41]** It wasn't really a blended family. What had happened is my father, who had two young boys, his wife passed on in 1939. My mother answered an ad for a housekeeper when she's coming west, for a young widower in Hedley looking for an in-house housekeeper. That turned out to be Florence Northeast, at the time. She came out to Hedley to look after two young boys, fell in love with them, eventually fell in love with my father, Freeman Crowther. In 1942, they were married. It really wasn't a blended family because she bore three children, which was Sharon, Myrna and me, the youngest. It wasn't sort of blended in the usual sense.

**SG [00:01:38]** Your father did not have a family previous to that.

**RC [00:01:42]** Yes, he did but she didn't bring anybody. She bore her children.

**SG [00:01:49]** Nonetheless, there was family from pre-39 and family that included you and your siblings at the time.

**RC [00:01:57]** Yes. They came later. I understand that's not the definition of a blended family. My understanding of a blended family is you bring a family to a marriage and the other person brings family to the marriage, but anyhow, it's semantics.

**SG [00:02:14]** You brought former siblings in and some new siblings.

**RC [00:02:19]** Right, but they were to come after 1942.

**SG [00:02:25]** Mining towns like Hedley and Bralorne and places like that were quite numerous in the B.C. Interior at that time. Many of them were affiliated, I understand, with the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. Can you tell me a bit about where your dad worked at that time?

**RC [00:02:40]** Yeah, my dad was in the machine shop at Hedley Kelowna Explorations mines.

**SG [00:02:48]** What kind of mine was it?

**RC** [00:02:49] It was a gold mine. He worked there from '36 till its closure in 1955. We then moved on to Allenby where he continued as a machinist but for Granby Copper.

**RC** [00:03:07] He was very active in Hedley and my formative years were based in Hedley. I always was very happy to run up and meet him at the bridge, footbridge, especially on Saturdays, and grab his lunch pail out of his blackened hands and run ahead and see what he had left for lunch, see if he had an apple or something for me to eat.

**RC** [00:03:35] He was very active not only in Mine Mill. He was the secretary as part of the '46 strike. He was active in the CCF. He was active in the school board. He was part of the local school board. He was active in the Moose Lodge, part of the Moose Lodge in Hedley. He was quite an active person.

**SG** [00:03:55] How big was the community in Hedley at that time? What would be the rough population?

**RC** [00:04:01] I would think probably around 1500, yeah, I think so. It was small town. I loved it. I played outside all the time, seemed like 365 days of the year. We were always outside having fun.

**SG** [00:04:19] What do you remember about union events at that time from Hedley? Anything that's in your memory as a child in Hedley?

**RC** [00:04:25] Yeah. We had the Christmas concerts, we had the Labour Day picnics, the Labour Day ballpark. At the ballpark we had the ball tournament and the Labour Day parade—

**SG** [00:04:43] Organized by—

**RC** [00:04:46] The local, yeah. I recall a couple of times, don't forget I'm in 1947 and leave in '56 actually.

**SG** [00:04:59] That's one of the things that the closure and mine closures were also part of the reality at that time. Was that the case for your family too?

**RC** [00:05:10] Yes, Hedley closed down so he got a job in the machine shop in Allenby, which is the mill town for Granby up in Copper Mountain. The mill town was Allenby, the mine was Copper Mountain. That closed down two years later and we moved on to Hope. He got a job at Giant Mascot again in the machine shop. That was, I think for about 18 months and that closed down so he went over to Britannia to get a job there in the machine shop for Anaconda Mines, the mill at Britannia Beach.

**RC** [00:05:47] He'd come home on weekends from time to time through the Greyhound bus. We saw him and he sort of indicated maybe we should move there but my mum said, 'No, I've done moving'. As it turned out, that closed down and he came back to Hope. I think it was Western Mines reorganized and opened up so his remainder years, I'm talking now, '63 through to '72 were there at Hope.

**RC** [00:06:19] He had a dreadful disease, really dreadful disease: emphysema in which you're [gasps for breath] you know, you're almost drowning. It's such a dramatic thing. It was so hard for him. As he worked there a number of times there was welding fumes, he'd

be brought home on the ambulance. From time to time, my sisters, Sharon and Myrna, would spray their hair and then, oh, oh, he'd have an attack so they had to not do that.

**SG** [00:06:51] It's been occupationally generated.

**RC** [00:06:54] He also was a smoker, though. He liked those Sweet Caps. I remember back in Hedley helping him. Well, it seems ridiculous now and we know it's the wrong thing to do, but helping him roll his cigarettes. He always rolled the cigarettes and he was a Sweet Cap guy. It was a combination of both.

**SG** [00:07:12] Industrial workers—occupational disease and smoking often went together. Unfortunately.

**RC** [00:07:17] Yeah. Crazy.

**SG** [00:07:20] Your education went from a small school in Hedley to high school in Hope and then you went on from there to university.

**RC** [00:07:29] Right.

**RC** [00:07:31] In Hope I carried on being very active. In Hope one of the first things that my pal, Barry Hislop and I did. I was a worm fisher in the Coquihalla and he was a fly fisher in the Skagit. When David Brousseau, the Liberal MLA, wants to save the Skagit, we help leaflet that. We were involved early in just putting leaflets around in Hope, letting people know that Dave's coming to town.

**RC** [00:08:00] I also was very active with Bill Hartley because Bill Hartley at the time, in 1963, the MLA was Irvine Corbett and we didn't want Social Credit, we wanted car insurance. I'm 16 years old so I go around town hammering Hartley for car insurance. As a young person I was interested in public auto so I meet up with Hartley and I'm part of that campaign, even though I'm part of the NDY youth but we'd go around campaigning for car insurance.

**RC** [00:08:34] Bill Hartley, a wonderful human being. Later on I'd meet him in Ashcroft when I met him again. He had a tremendous influence on my life, really, on how to service his people in the sense of okay, you have a problem. Let's go and fix it. That kind of an approach.

**SG** [00:08:54] Your point of entry was car insurance.

**RC** [00:08:56] Car insurance. That's right.

**SG** [00:08:59] Makes sense.

**RC** [00:08:59] Then I'm on to university after I graduate and I first go to UBC in 1965. I graduated in 1965 so over to '66. I was trying to be a student at UBC. There's all kinds of stuff going on out there. What I mean by that is the Vietnam War. I remember going down and helping the Voice of Women and other folks downtown pass out leaflets in front of the Capitol Theatre and Theatre Row there about peace, that we need to work for peace and end the war. The war was horrendous. They had the napalm situation there. I remember we occupied some offices when Dow Chemical was trying to recruit people and we stopped that. There's different things that we did to try and end the war. But my studies did

suffer. I passed one subject Zoology 101, and I credit that to my lab partner being Ann Mortifee, we working together. That's not a good batting average, one out of five, I guess. (laughter)

**SG** [00:10:30] This activity was generated by all of the life around you at UBC?

**RC** [00:10:34] Yes. I wasn't alone. There's all kinds of people there. I wouldn't leave the impression that it was me at all. I was part of a whole host of people.

**SG** [00:10:45] That leads me to my next question. One of the things that you really notice is a lot of people from working class families went to university and discovered a whole different world there. Later on, they wanted to also be relevant and be part of what was happening, but they wanted to bring it back into the working class community that they'd come from. I get the sense that your life was kind of that path to some degree, too.

**RC** [00:11:13] Right. I did a stint at SFU and it wasn't any more successful. Then I was in the PSA department.

**RC** [00:11:23] Moving on to my work life is that I came back from being back east in Expo 67 and all that stuff around Canada Day. I was fortunate to be in Ottawa on July 1st, 1967.

**RC** [00:11:44] The fall of '67 I was bored. Throughout my life I've always worked, whether it'd be a paper boy or measuring water or collecting boxed wood up in Hope, always to get a few bucks or getting bottles along the road from the Copper Mountain miners and taking them down to Princeton. I was always active in getting work. I had to have work. I said to my dad, 'Wow I'm bored, I want a job.'

**RC** [00:12:12] There's no jobs around Hope. He said, 'Well, maybe I don't really want you to work in the mines.' That was his mantra. None of my folks or boys or whatever should work in the mines. I said, 'Yeah, but...', 'Okay.'

**SG** [00:12:30] Why wouldn't he want you to work in the mines?

**RC** [00:12:32] Because we keep moving around. It's very disruptive and it's not the healthiest workplace to live in. As it turned out, I was the second son of three that ended up in the mines because I'm able to get a job in Ashcroft. I became a sample bucker and an assayer, a shift assayer. Then soon got active in the union because it's there.

**SG** [00:13:01] Tell me a little bit about the kind of work you were doing in that mine the first time out.

**RC** [00:13:09] I was a shift sample bucker. This is going around scooping up samples from the flotation froth that's coming up to measure the amount of copper that's in there and picking up samples from the truck samplers. They'd actually bring them over. You measure again the copper. This is all for the assayer that's working around the clock.

**RC** [00:13:36] The sample bucker just prepares the samples for the assayer. As it turned out through some odd circumstances, two months later, (I was hired in late February of '68). Two months later, I'd become the shift assayer. Assaying means putting, you measure, you put acids on and determine the amount of copper that's in the ore samples coming from the mill. Then you report that to the pit boss about every two hours because they rely on where the shovels are as to where the assay is. If there's too much copper

coming off then they're losing copper out the door. So the feed that they're feeding is too high, so they want to move it or combine more waste with it.

**SG** [00:14:33] In other words, keep a constant amount of ore.

**RC** [00:14:36] That's right.

**SG** [00:14:37] — actual copper going in.

**RC** [00:14:38] At point five or point four in there in what they call heads, which is the percentage of copper. It was a very interesting job. We'd do other assays from exploration. By this time the mining valley was getting active in terms of discovering new copper and new molybdenum. I was at the forefront of that, the great expansion that would become Highland Valley, eventually Highland Valley Copper. It was quite exciting actually.

**RC** [00:15:09] And assaying, like people in the warehouse, we have lots of time. And electricians.

**SG** [00:15:16] At this time when Mine Mill has disappeared and merged with Steel, what is the union situation at the plant? At the mill at that time?

**RC** [00:15:28] When I came in, I'd become a member of the Tunnel and Rock Workers Union because at 168 they have the jurisdiction for the mill area, including the assay office. The rest of the mine is Operating Engineers 115 C (construction).

**RC** [00:15:46] That's a dual pact. They replaced the Steel Mine Mill because it was just wrapping up, if you like. Lo and behold, Steel wants back in in 1968. I was part of that organizing committee led by Archie McDonald and Vince Ready but we fell short. At that time I was somewhat interested in the Steelworkers because they were part of the NDP. But the people that I'm working with on our committee want a local union. That's their issue. They don't want a local based down here. They don't want to be part of a construction union. They don't see themselves as construction workers. That was the gist. Then Steel was then successful.

**RC** [00:16:39] Later on, by the time you move into the 1970s the workers at Alcan had moved from the Steelworkers into, formed their own union, CASAW. Then at Trail, the Canadian Workers Union, led by Doug Swanson, had started their own union.

**RC** [00:16:59] That whole committee was organizing against the Steelworkers there. So '72, you're talking about the real prime time for Canadian workers to form their own unions and break away from the American unions.

**SG** [00:17:15] What did you see as the example of where you thought you should go? Was it particularly from Kitimat, the Alcan smelter?

**RC** [00:17:26] That was part of it, but also the Canadian Workers Union.

**RC** [00:17:31] We ended up—kind of silly when you look back at it, but we formed our own little union, our group called the Highland Valley Workers' Union, ran off some cards and started our little sign up and start going.

**RC** [00:17:45] A friend of mine said, 'Hold it, I think you need a constitution.' 'Okay.'

**RC** [00:17:51] I remember a while back in the discussions with Doug Swanson, back in September, 'If you get any problems, get a hold of Jimmy Sloan in Castlegar, PPWC.'

**RC** [00:18:05] So I got that. I remembered that letter, I went and got it. Then phoned PPWC Jimmy Sloan told him what the problem is. 'Hold it, hold it.' so he gets ahold of Fred Mullan who was the national president at that time and said, 'Yeah, don't do anything more. We'll come up.' 'What do you mean we?' He said, 'Well, I'm going to bring along a friend of mine, Jess Succamore from the Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers.'

**RC** [00:18:34] 'Well, that's quite a mouthful. Anyhow. Sure. Whatever.'

**RC** [00:18:37] They came up on November the 10th. They both made presentations. We looked at both of the constitutions because to us, now we're familiar, there needs to be a constitution. Okay, what is the best constitution to work with us?

**RC** [00:18:56] The structure, they both talked a bit about the structure. There was definitely more local union autonomy actually in the pulp workers, but a lot of us were concerned about, the big guy back there in the mining industry is the Steelworkers, so we felt more comfortable with CAIMAW. My preference too was with CAIMAW looking at the constitution, just the objects of the constitution. We decided then to go with CAIMAW.

**RC** [00:19:29] Jess was saying, 'Well, hold it, hold it. It's too far.' We said, 'Well, we've got members already.'

**RC** [00:19:36] He said, 'Hold it, I can't do this. It's not up to me. I'm not the regional vice president, it's George Brown.' He introduces George Brown in the conversation. 'Okay.'

**RC** [00:19:46] George Brown comes up two weeks later, we have a meeting. We decide to go ahead. We're totally impressed with the man. He was a tremendous person, just a tremendous person.

**SG** [00:20:00] How many people were at that meeting? Do you remember?

**RC** [00:20:02] It was in Chuck MacDonald's basement. I think there's about 16 people. We go ahead and look at getting a charter. Then we have a charter meeting and I can't say just how many were in the charter meeting. It wasn't long after that. There was the charter meeting and we started to sign up officially in Local 8 Mineworkers.

**SG** [00:20:27] This basically is the birth of the first mining local in CAIMAW at the time.

**RC** [00:20:31] That's right.

**SG** [00:20:34] What was the vote like to certify at that point, do you remember?

**RC** [00:20:42] 185 to 121 or something. I should know that. It's been a long time.

**SG** [00:20:49] But it wasn't unanimous or anything.

**RC** [00:20:52] Oh no no no. Then the Operating Engineers then, there's a lot of loyalty to them because they were a construction union, especially in the pit. You know, the pit and

the machine shop. Their shop steward came from the machine shop area. It was a good campaign.

**SG** [00:21:10] Interesting. You've mentioned that your life in activity in the labour movement has always had kind of a Mine Mill flavour to it. Can you explain what you meant by that comment? It kind of struck me at the time.

**RC** [00:21:26] Well, my father was Mine Mill and I always liked to hear the stories. I read the Mine Mill Herald while he read The Financial Post.

**RC** [00:21:40] I'd sit there beside him and read these stories and thought that's an impressive community-based union, so that seems to make sense, especially in the mining section of our union. That's just my bent just from osmosis. I can't recall any particular story from Mine Mill.

**RC** [00:22:00] When I said that aside to my father, reading the Financial Post he says, I do, I do. I want to know what they're up to. I'm still a socialist, but I have to keep track of these guys.

**SG** [00:22:14] Did your CAIMAW culture reflect what you thought is that rank and file participation and so on in Mine Mill as well?

**RC** [00:22:21] Yes, definitely. When I eventually, in 1973 under George Brown's leadership, we negotiated a contract with Bethlehem Copper and I'm immediately impressed by the style. We canvassed all the different departments in the mines. We went over proposals, whole democratic process. His bargaining, that was terrific. His rapport with the mining company. The first negotiations I had. I then was able to subsequently negotiate a warehouseman in—and the office staff, up there at the Bethlehem Copper mine.

**RC** [00:23:04] When I come down to the lower mainland for visits Cathy Walker is in the chair. Ever see Cathy Walker in the chair? Boom. There's order. When I come down and meet with these people and see Local One. it's meeting at the Capri on Kingsway. I come down, and we'd speak to them and watch their meetings. Definitely rank and file control because even though Cathy's a firm chair, people get up to speak, there's differences of opinion. You know it was just terrific watching the debate back and forth. They're not all on-side on the issues.

**RC** [00:23:40] They have their own local union, the Sparker, and by this time we had developed our own local mining paper, the Valley Miner. Each of the mining locals subsequent have their own newspaper. We had the national review, it was our national newspaper, the CAIMAW National Review. Local One had the Sparker which came actually from the Canadian Electrical Workers, the Sparker.

**RC** [00:24:06] They had communications and on their local executive board was much like our national executive board. On the national executive board, one local each was on the national executive board.

**RC** [00:24:27] In Local One there was reports from each of the shops, International Harvester, etc. I think it was maybe ten, 15 shops. You'd hear these reports. I guess what I'm trying to get across there was ongoing constant communication and I think that's the

strength of CAIMAW in repelling all the raids. Everybody knew what was going on. We put a little extra work in that but that's fine.

**SG** [00:24:55] Did you get miners and whatnot actually actively participating in producing this paper? Were they contributing to it themselves?

**RC** [00:25:02] Yes.

**SG** [00:25:05] Not only rank and file participation, but actually writing about it as well?

**RC** [00:25:10] Right. Yeah.

**SG** [00:25:11] Often unusual in unions.

**RC** [00:25:14] We'd work on 'em, eh? We had an office back in Ashcroft, backing up now. We never had an office under the Operating Engineers so we had an office right next door. It's right across from the Ashcroft Hotel next door to the Ashcroft Journal.

**RC** [00:25:32] We would meet and discuss what we're going to put in The Miner. My wife was good enough to type it up.

**RC** [00:25:42] Each of the mines had their own. Local 10 had the Babine Miner, Local 17, the Moly Miner, Local 18, the Cariboo Miner, Local 22 at Princeton had the Vermilion Miner. Working on a foundation, if you like, of the Sparker, that idea of communicating with the rank and file; the rank and file also writing, right? That's a way of keeping control. For the rank and file control they have to participate. It's not about the full-timers at all; it's about the rank and file and talking about their issues. That's another way of talking about rank and file control is that they're part of doing the work.

**SG** [00:26:23] At the same time you, I presume, were elected to local leadership?

**RC** [00:26:27] Yes. At the charter meeting I became the local recording secretary and on the national executive board. So, I had a dual— from 1973 on to when I come on staff in April of 1976, I had those dual roles so I was connected into the union through there.

**RC** [00:26:56] I loved the union, right.

**SG** [00:26:59] From the very beginning you went from local leadership to a position on the national executive board. Did that go with the position as local leader?

**RC** [00:27:07] No, they were separate. At our local meeting that one of a number of positions come up and that's the last position. I was nominated and accepted so I was on the national executive board through the critical time in our history.

**SG** [00:27:27] Then in a very short time, when you're saying 1976, you were on national staff of CAIMAW.

**RC** [00:27:34] Yeah.

**SG** [00:27:36] How did that come about, exactly? Same process sort of?



**RC** [00:27:42] It's up to the regional vice-presidents in consultation with the national secretary-treasurer as to who should be on staff. Unfortunately George Brown had died on April the 4th, 1974. We had Peter Cameron, who's an excellent person in terms of negotiating and a very highly skilled person. He and Jess had discussions and I was first approached and accepted the position. Then I'm assigned—

**SG** [00:28:26] By this time CAIMAW has also organized in a whole number of other areas as well during that period. What were you assigned to? Is that normally how it's done? You were assigned certain areas as a national rep?

**RC** [00:28:38] That's right. I was assigned the Machinists Union's certifications, the automotive section, the truck shops, like the dealerships, like Inland Kenworth, Fruehauf Trailer and the big truck plants, Kenworth and Freightliner and also the refinery Local 12, Shell Oil.

**SG** [00:29:05] Fairly big responsibilities. I understand one of the big issues that emerged in that part of the industry was the equal pay for work of equal value.

**RC** [00:29:16] Right.

**SG** [00:29:17] Which also prompted a big strike at Kenworth. What happened there? Tell me more.

**RC** [00:29:26] There's just one issue I want to bring in here prior to that strike is we had a Paccar conference in Denver, Colorado. We were invited by the international unions. We went to Paccar conference in Denver.

**SG** [00:29:45] Can you explain what Paccar is?

**RC** [00:29:46] Paccar is Pacific Car and Foundry. It owns Canadian Kenworth and all the Kenworth and Peterbilt plants and also in Newark, New Jersey.

**RC** [00:29:57] I guess the significance of that is that our contract is significantly better, because we all were asked to bring our contracts.

**RC** [00:30:06] The other thing that happened is that there was a strike at Ste. Therese, Quebec and they picketed us in Burnaby and we respected that picket line, although we were sued for damages. That's '78 but there's sort of that agitated background going on because we never expected this. What this is, is that we organized seven data processors in the life of the agreement '78 to '80. We didn't think it'd be a problem because we had Freightliner office. We had staff. There'd already been a history of Kenworth and Freightliner back and forth, similar agreements so we didn't think this is going to be a problem. It's a huge problem, a huge, huge problem.

**RC** [00:30:54] We ended up having to go to arbitration. Their position was you have to look at the external rates, which are mainly nonunion, but external out there. Our position is in the plant you have to look at the plant wages, because there is some, these seven data processors, two of them go back and forth.

**RC** [00:31:16] They went on and took the position, and much to our surprise Hugh Ladner agreed with them, so we have this background of a very minor award something like 5 or 10 cents. Can't quite remember but it was tremendously bad and would undermine our

position at Freightliner office if we'd ever accepted it. Of course we wouldn't have accepted, so we met with all our members, explained the situation.

**RC** [00:31:45] There's 350 men there and one woman in the plant working. What are we going to do about this? There's some important improvements that we made but in the final analysis people said, 'No, we're going to stand.' So that we did. When we went down to the Villa Motor Hotel to try and get the thing resolved, the company says, 'Not 'till hell freezes over.'

**RC** [00:32:12] Total shock. Total shock because we were prepared to get down to one issue. Let's have some accommodation on this issue. That's basically what I'm saying.

**RC** [00:32:23] It was known right then that the vote was fairly close to reject the contract so I didn't expect, again, perhaps my naivete. I never expected that we'd have a seven and a half month strike.

**RC** [00:32:36] And the pivotal moment. One of the pivotal moments actually, is when my young son is born at 5:30 in the morning, Chris, on July the 3rd, 1980. I have to go out—not 'have to' go out, I partly organized it was the picketing of the RCMP at what they called the Gilpin lockup. We had about 400 people out there. It was a tremendous rally. In fact, the community has to be. When they strike, a very difficult strike in the sense that the company is getting the RCMP. We had 16 trucks, if you like, trapped on the line where we set up the pickets.

**RC** [00:33:16] Every once in while: boom, out come the trucks. Never tested on the highways of British Columbia, but escorted by the RCMP. We're chasing them all over the place. We had the radio CBs back then.

**RC** [00:33:31] We had quite a few adventures chasing these trucks and getting interference from either the RCMP or some white paneled trucks carrying Alberta license plates. There's an ongoing thing as we try to stop these trucks, mainly at the weigh scales, either the one in Port Kells, right by the freeway there, and the other one out at Flood there.

**RC** [00:33:59] Our focus was on the RCMP and their conduct. It was atrocious. Had a huge rally, different speakers. It was so great to have my young daughter Kim and young son Kelly having their pickets on because I always remember my wife saying 'That night, I took young Christopher and I said, There's your daddy and there's your sister and there's your brother and they're out there picketing the RCMP.' He gets to us hooked in because all three of them, they're active. Chris has always been active. They're trade unionists. They may not be quite the same way as me, but that's fine, and I think my son over in Duncan would say, 'Dad, you weren't around that much. I understand from you talking to me that your dad wasn't around too much so I'm going to look after my family first. I said, 'Well, makes sense.'

**SG** [00:35:05] Still, the family history is, there's your picture on the picket line.

**RC** [00:35:10] You know something? I could go on. I got to tell one more story. As we're driving past these trucks, my wife is in the car ahead of them, trying to— and Merl, who was my friend from Kenworth and an organizer I went across British Columbia with. I says, you know, maybe she's having a miscarriage, I mean. What is that woman doing? She

finally got off at Sumas and had the better thought. But I was, I was quite concerned the way she was carrying on. Everything worked out. We're fine.

**SG** [00:35:49] What finally happened with the strike itself? How was it finally resolved?

**RC** [00:35:55] Freightliner was in negotiations, had started in the summer and went through the fall. They were kind of dragging their feet a bit. This is in November. Our strike was carrying on at Kenworth. They were—I said, 'Look, we want to have a contract. Pretty well everything was settled. You never want those Paccar strikers from around the corner CAIMAW come around, so let's get a deal done.' It seemed to make it a deal and the deal was done. I think seven days later, maybe a little bit more, Kenworth settled, which is what I always expected, because they followed one another. That whole strike of equal pay for work of equal value, which is so important for the community, and did follow after our agreement the fair wage strike at the city came in '81 so there was some continuance of this struggle for equal pay for work of equal value.

**RC** [00:36:59] It's also in the CAIMAW constitution, one of the objects is to work for equal pay for work of equal value. When I joined the union back, it was Madeleine Parent's terrific speech, one of the best speeches I ever heard was on equal pay for work of equal value. There's quite a history.

**SG** [00:37:22] You also took on a lot of other responsibilities on your CAIMAW roster at that point. That also involved challenging other unions so that must have posed a lot of challenges both organizationally and with employers. Can you tell me about some of those? Particularly in the food and service workers, you took on responsibilities for them.

**RC** [00:37:53] The union, the Food Associated Service Workers of Canada approached us for a merger in 1987 and we agreed after some discussions. That was the 19 White Spots. We had 55 Kentucky Fried Chickens and the commissary down on Marine Drive and the ICTU support staff, that's what I recall we brought into our union. The first up, of course, was White Spot, didn't seem to want us.

**SG** [00:38:34] Tell me about the White Spot workers. They had previously been in the Food and Service Workers of Canada—

**RC** [00:38:41] Yes, you're right.

**SG** [00:38:41] — then came to CAIMAW through the merger.

**RC** [00:38:44] Right. Their issue was contracting out. One of the issues that people weren't comfortable at FASWOC, specifically had a specific provision that the company shall contract out or had the right to contract out work. For a lot of the activists then that was not acceptable. There's a real fear of the company contracting out jobs here, there and everywhere.

**SG** [00:39:09] Were you able to challenge that?

**RC** [00:39:10] Yes. We got rid of that at both the commissary and the White Spot restaurants.

**SG** [00:39:19] Then at one point, they also had a famous arbitration about the common employer as to whether or not it would be one-by-one or a common employer that would be representing, that you would represent.

**RC** [00:39:34] We were already the representative of the 19 White Spots.

**SG** [00:39:39] So that preceded the actual merger with CAIMAW, something I'll have to talk to Denise about.

**RC** [00:39:47] I think so.

**SG** [00:39:52] We haven't talked about your own personal responsibilities at this point. You talked about a wife and children. When did you get married and had your family?

**RC** [00:40:06] My sister-in-law, Jacquie Crowther, was always interested in how was Roger coming down from Ashcroft? How is he doing? Bring out her Rothmans and I'd bring out my du Maurier, we'd have a smoke there and a cup of tea. Her tea was always too weak. 'So how is your love life? How have you met?' all that stuff. 'No, she's got to be NDP and I haven't found any NDP'ers up that way.' 'I got just the person for you.' Pat Whiting was her name. She came over on Boxing Day of 1974 and we just hit it off. That was good. The next thing you know we're up in Ashcroft together as a family. We have a house up in Ashcroft. She's been very supportive all through my time. I'm extremely fortunate. We had Kelly, a young boy of probably 7 or 8 and then Kim, two years older. We all became a happy family up that way and I've been great ever since.

**SG** [00:41:28] In the meantime, you also hit the wall of free trade in manufacturing and in a lot of closures that came about as a result of that.

**RC** [00:41:38] I was part of that, just not me, but from our local, CAIMAW Local 14. We're part of the Anti-Free Trade campaign of 1987-88. Mulroney had called the election and free trade was the issue. We had to scramble around working with Sue Vohanka and other people in the CCU, just not CAIMAW, fighting the free trade agreement. All of a sudden he's called the election, so they wanted lawn signs. We went out and advanced money. That's the great thing about CAIMAW is the locals were great in advancing money either to the national union, to other locals within CAIMAW, in this case the BC Council of the CCU. They realized that this had to be stopped. We went around town and hammered in signs, lawn signs all over the place to get people's attention that we don't want free trade now the election's called. I'll always remember being out there when Mulroney comes to Kyle Centre in Coquitlam. I wasn't nice and neither were a lot of other people.

**RC** [00:43:06] He was taking our country from us, it has never been the same since.

**SG** [00:43:09] This very bitter campaign.

**RC** [00:43:11] It's the first time I thought about maybe not voting NDP; you should vote Liberal. Then I heard my dad say, 'You never can vote Liberal.' I wish the NDP campaign had been better, but that's history.

**SG** [00:43:26] Nonetheless, at a certain point. I'm guessing that a lot of the closures were putting a squeeze on CAIMAW's membership finally led you to a bigger decision to merge with another union. Can you tell me about that?

**RC** [00:43:42] We had struck a committee, the two regional vice presidents and then Jess and our national president to explore mergers with other unions, first of all within the CCU.

**SG** [00:43:56] What brought about those discussion? Were there any particular things or was it just a growing—

**RC** [00:44:02] A growing apprehension that we're losing members due to free trade. So how do we preserve a vital Canadian union, one that's rank and file. We approached different unions within the CCU. None of them were interested in merger. Then we went and we talked to the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transportation Workers Union, the Fishermen's Union.

**RC** [00:44:34] At this time, too, the Canadian Auto Workers had approached us and said that they were looking to— there were things happening in western Canada and obviously CAIMAW with two offices, one in Winnipeg and one in Vancouver, or New Westminster, would provide anchors, if you like, for them expanding in Western Canada. They already had national airlines in Richmond offices. The rail locals out in Port Coquitlam had their own locals. They had small shops, parts dealerships in one local. The long and short of that is, against this kind of background we have negotiations, if you like, informal discussions, different talks with the Canadian Auto Workers.

**RC** [00:45:31] One of the issues that comes up early is what would this national office look like because in each and every one of the other national offices, they don't have a hall like we had a hall in the regional office at 707 12th Street and there is an indication early that they want that culture to continue. I and I think a couple other people probably Harold David when I met with Hemi Mitic or Buzz Hargrove I said 'No, that's not going to happen. You have to have the hall.' 'We don't have a hall in our system. You don't have to have a hall.' The hall has to continue. What we have at 707 has to continue.

**RC** [00:46:12] We knew they were expanding. We'd been talking informally, the bus drivers, etc. good friends of mine, let's get moving here. I mean the Canadian Auto Workers, they fought free trade, seemed like a decent union. Let's try.

**RC** [00:46:25] Anyhow, it wasn't that easy. There was that issue and then there was the issue of— eventually they agreed. Then we had the issue sort of the culture issue, in terms of they wanted a western region. We said, okay, but the person would have to be elected like in Quebec. Why can't we have what they have in Quebec? We want an elected director then, western Ottawa. That was set aside. That was the difference of opinion and eventually that goes to a conference. The majority don't want a western region. It means different officers in that attached to a western region. We've ended up now as a B.C.- Alberta regional conference and they have conferences, I think spring and fall, so there's that regional conference.

**RC** [00:47:22] What I am reporting out though is that the hall was instrumental and for me, that's social unionism. We did a lot of stuff in the hall up the street at 707 12th Street. We're talking about a brand-new building. What's the nature of the hall? That was important, not just to me, but for Harold David, for Jess that so I don't want to...It wasn't as easy as people may think it was. They didn't want a national hall.

**SG** [00:47:51] It wasn't a slam dunk merger.

**RC** [00:47:53] No. There were other issues about servicing. I had real concerns about the wording in the constitution, about the control that the president might have over collective bargaining. We had to sort out, kind of reassert servicing based on their statements to us, in a merger agreement, basically how things would function so that we could keep absolute control of collective bargaining, which really is what it's all about if you don't have control of. One of the reasons we believe in Canadian unions, you have to have control of your union within Canada so you can control your collective agreement. That's fundamental.

**SG** [00:48:33] One of the things that's not talked about a lot is the merger took place and everybody kind of goes, yeah, they merged with CAW in 1991, but nobody's really talked about how the membership felt about that. What was the vote like in the final, I presume it was ratified by the membership?

**RC** [00:48:52] The membership were quite excited because there was so many positive benefits with Canadian Auto Workers in terms of resources, in terms of, everything's documented in the Canadian Auto Workers. If you go to a regional meeting or to the national conference, everything is reported, everything is above board. That's how we operated. That's the way they operated. Members sensed that the way that Buzz Hargrove presented himself or Bob White.

**RC** [00:49:22] It was 87%, the vote 'for.' You must remember the national president actually was against the merger. It is a rank and file controlled union. The national president wasn't in favour of this but the rest of the rank and file executive board and of course, Jess as the only full time officer, was in favour of it all through this process.

**RC** [00:49:47] Harold David, for instance, he had his real reservations about the CAIMAW health and welfare plan being gobbled up by Greenshield. We had to have a separate meeting in New Westminster with Greenshield, and I think Tommy Saunders was there. Jess was there. I was there. We have an agreement at least I think it was for ten years that CAIMAW health and welfare plan continue. It was definitely much superior to Greenshield, not just in benefits, but in the way it was operated. We had an excellent administrator called Spencer Mohart. That's always a whole other issue about how we interact with the insurance companies and whether we follow up in helping workers sort out their concerns with the life insurance or disability benefits is really important.

**SG** [00:50:39] That was the old Chips plan, right?

**RC** [00:50:42] Yeah. That was really important to us. If there was a difficulty there, I wouldn't have agreed to the merger. I was on the board. The regional vice president sat on the board, if you like, or the trustees and the regional vice president sat on the management, if you like. Spencer Mohart was accountable to the trustees and the regional vice president. Later on because I said 'Look, why is the regional vice president doing this stuff? Why don't you have your local?' They agreed a local person should be on board so I relinquished that but it was always close to my heart. It did a lot of good stuff for us, for our members.

**SG** [00:51:22] You had your own personal reservations about some of this?

**RC** [00:51:24] Yeah, you get your personal reservations against the needs of your members.

**SG** [00:51:31] You carried on, I presume, a lot of your existing responsibilities with CAIMAW in, now in CAW. The landscape has also changed there, particularly in service workers. That's a very different, service worker... One of the things that I recall from that period, and I'm not sure how emblematic it was, was the McDonald's organization in Squamish, which I believe CAW was part of, and you personally were also involved in.

**RC** [00:52:01] Right. Yeah.

**SG** [00:52:02] Tell me a bit about that. Must have been an interesting.

**RC** [00:52:04] Yeah. It was great. I have to say that Ryan Krell—we had, the local paid a youth organizer, Ryan Krell, had made contact with them. Denise followed up, being the local president at the time, maybe staff by now. We had some meetings with them. I was always impressed by the group that we met with, the two women, I forget their names, and some older workers who were concerned about their job security, being older workers. To them, the seniority benef— part of what a union could offer was paramount. There's also issues of health and safety. It's amazing when you get into, whether it had been Starbucks or McDonald's, how important health and safety are in terms of burns, slippage, falling, that kind of stuff.

**RC** [00:53:06] We put together proposals after we won the vote and negotiated, negotiated and negotiated. One of our problems was, is that under the Labour Code, if you don't have a collective agreement within the ten months you're up against possible decertification. The strike vote was close. It was I think, 61%. The other thing is you're having a turnover. You have the students. A lot of the students were there were moving on. You have a quite a bit of turnover in a McDonald's restaurant. It wasn't easy.

**SG** [00:53:47] Did you find there and elsewhere, that the turnover tended to eventually lead to a decertification and to take away some of the momentum in that?

**RC** [00:53:56] Yes, it's really challenging. It behooves the labour movement to find strategies to deal with that.

**SG** [00:54:06] You're saying you feel that you weren't able to find a lot of those strategies at that time, that it was a losing battle to a great extent against those employers?

**RC** [00:54:15] Well, it wasn't successful. I don't know whether it's losing, because I think if you expose young workers to a union and its values and its ideals. We accepted the mediator, Breckenridge's, recommendations. They rejected it. They outwaited us. We lost the certification. That's how it sort of wound up. That was also against the background, McDonald's had closed a restaurant in Ste. Therese, Quebec? Quebec, anyhow. That whole idea of closure, remember, the corporate media likes to say, well, what about the closure here? What about? You're down at the labour board and you have to remain positive. Even though we weren't successful, we were putting the idea out there because we're the only certified McDonald's in North America.

**RC** [00:55:09] It actually took interest over in Great Britain and Europe. I was trying to say what we needed in British Columbia is what you have over here in Europe which is a national certification process. We talked about that in the early '90s, I think with Harcourt about having a sectoral bargaining and having that kind of a system. Unless we get to sectoral bargaining, we're going to be really unsuccessful, I think, in organizing young

people. It's probably the same with gig workers. We have to develop strategies around gig workers. But I'm twenty—what? 22 years retired now.

**SG** [00:55:46] That's an ongoing conversation in the labour movement, I'm sure. I'm going to move into what I think is a very much a relevant issue right now, but was also at that time in the late '90s when you were part of the founding group that established the Labour Environmental Alliance Society. Tell me a bit about that.

**RC** [00:56:07] I was chair of the VDLC's Environmental Committee. One thing that always bothered me and bothered a lot of trade unionists, I think, is how the environmentalists just thumbed their nose at the needs of workers, which is a job, good paying job, raise their families, and not communicate in any way. At the same time, the reaction of the labour movement in picketing them. The premier of B.C. saying 'they're bad British Columbians' I mean, the environment—. All that noise, if you like, we had to settle it down.

**RC** [00:56:48] One day I was in Mae Burrows' office. She's working for the T. Buck Suzuki Foundation. I said, 'We got to do something about this. What I'm talking about is a fine trade unionist out there picketing Greenpeace. Mae, that's not what we want, right?' The long and the short of our discussions, we decided that we should be a labour environmental forum where we get both labour and environmentalists sitting down around a table. We have a big table there at the Maritime Labour Council. I got the trade union community together. She got a lot of environmental. It turns out there's a lot more environmentalists that wanted to actually talk dialogue than there were trade unionists. We did get the Pulp Paper and Woodworkers of Canada. We got the BC Government Employees Union, we got CEP. There were some interested in the labour movement in talking face to face with environmentalists. To Mae's credit, she came up with a number of forum issues such as just transition, talking about the banks, different issues that people could relate to. It was a great pleasure to work with her. I was part of a conference, organizing a conference with the BC environmental committee to talk about how can we bring labour, environmental people together to talk these issues over. Again, the engine, the workhorse, was Mae Burrows.

**SG** [00:58:24] What's your recollection of some of the forums that took place? Was it a fractious discussion? Was it a useful discussion?

**RC** [00:58:33] It was really good. To sit down and hear other people's point of view, like on the impact of dioxins in the oceans and working on removing toxins from the workplace or from the oceans and learning that these are major concerns also of people in the labour movement, but also concerns of people in the environmental community. We were able to work on these different projects. When it comes to different issues at the forum, a lot of environmentalists are really good trade unionists, let's put it that way. They see the world much as we do. It's just a matter of, to me, establishing that dialogue and commonality. We have a lot more in common than we do apart.

**SG** [00:59:32] Finally you retired in 2001 after a pretty hefty career in the labour movement. What was your feeling of doing that when you—

**RC** [00:59:45] I sort of had to because of health reasons. I just thought also it was time to sort of move on and let the younger folks take over. I had to, I had some health issues. I was able to get away and repair myself, if you like, speak more intelligently because when they had the retirement party for me, on October the 27th, 2001, I had to have my wife write out, 'I'm only functioning on one cylinder. I'm sorry, but I welcome all of you to this.'



There was about a couple hundred people there at the Maritime Labour Center. I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of warmth and love for me, as I had for them. I had to repair myself. I went to California and on to Arizona, and enjoy the warmer winters and tried to heal myself, which I think I did because in 2003, I do come back and speak to—by this time, well so 20 years ago, the Iraq war, we had a big thing at the courthouse and speak about the destruction of an ancient civilization by George W. Bush. Talk about war criminals. Holy smokes. Let's start right there.

**SG** [01:01:15] That's something we only just now, I think, understanding what a toll it can take on active trade union leaders and the responsibilities they have and the challenges they face and sometimes they're just overwhelmed by it, as we all would be.

**RC** [01:01:28] Yeah.

**SG** [01:01:32] I see on your Facebook site now that you're still fighting the good fight in a lot of places.

**RC** [01:01:36] Yeah. Over there in Duncan. Our latest project is Freedom from War. The current project, of course, affects all of us. We have to stop the war before it stops all of us.

**RC** [01:01:50] We had a demonstration about two weeks ago we're on the anniversary of the war, which is immoral, illegal, all that stuff. It's just horrendous, not supporting Russia's position at all. I'm trying to understand it. We had this demonstration of about a dozen people out, all kinds of signs, absolutely gobsmacked if you like by the warm reception, honking horns. and people saying, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' It was refreshing because the impression you get from the media that this is— you know in our House of Commons, everybody's onside. Well, I'm not so sure the public is yet, this thing may change and that's the sooner the better. I was really impressed, as was all our group.

**RC** [01:02:38] We've had a number of, we meet every two weeks and discuss the issues. We have people online that bring their point of view.

**SG** [01:02:48] You're still keeping busy.

**RC** [01:02:48] Yeah, Yeah. Okay.

**SG** [01:02:50] Okay, I think that's it.

**RC** [01:02:51] Well, I appreciate it. Thanks very much.

**SG** [01:02:53] We appreciate your time and the energy you put into this. Thank you again.

**RC** [01:02:58] Thank you. Thank you very much.