

This recording is an interview of Cindy Miller, a currently working female longshoreman. The main themes of the interview are women in longshoring, types of work done by longshoremen, and recent changes in the industry, such as the introduction of a training program at BCIT, and an education committee.

Interviewers: Pamela Stern and Michelle La

Interview date: February 18, 2015

Date Range: 2003 to 2015

Sound Recording Length: 00:46:22

Also present: longshoremen Chrystal Yanoshewski and Denise Block and Denise's daughter Raven. Denise can be heard commenting at various points.

Cindy Miller started working as a longshoreman in 2003 at the age of 40, at the urging of her father-in-law. Her husband also started working longshore around the same time, but was more reluctant. Since then, her son and daughter have also become longshoremen. Cindy had previously worked in construction and thus was experienced in manual labour. This prepared her for the intensive and male-dominated workforce. She was part of a cohort of longshoremen trained through BCIT. She is an active member of the union's new education committee. She enjoys longshoring, and hopes to keep working for as long as she is physically able to.

Section 00:00 – 03:33

In this portion of the interview, Cindy describes how she started working in the longshore industry, after being urged to by her common-law husband's father. She had a background in construction, but was still slightly worried about joining a labour-heavy industry. She got only 3 jobs in her first month, March 2003, but was able to do them with ease. One of her first jobs was dockman, and she was pleasantly surprised to find that there was the flexibility to play a few rounds of cards with the guys in the morning before getting to work.

Section 03:34 – 06:22

In this portion of the interview, Cindy describes becoming a union member. She became a member after 11 years, and says that it takes 8-10 years on average. Two months before she became a member, her son played a trick on her, by hanging a "charge slip" on her plate and fooling her into thinking she would have to go before the grievance committee, potentially jeopardizing her good standing as a casual and thus her initiation into membership.

Section 06:23 – 10:15

In this portion of the interview, Cindy talks more about being a female longshoreman. Despite the fact that she started working at the same time as her husband, she was known as "Vern's wife" for the first few months. Since she started at the age of 40, she didn't feel comfortable working with log ships, especially after seeing other women come in with twisted or broken ankles afterwards. She worked a lot as dockman on the rail, as well as pulling chains, and lashing. Her husband got more work since he was willing to work log jobs, she was still "Vern's wife," but she slowly became known as just "Miller." She tells the story of how she became known as "Ryan's mom," after her son was involved in a near-fatal car accident witnessed by many longshoremen on their way to work.

Section 10:16 – 16:15

In this section, Cindy talks about the pleasure she gets from learning something new everyday. She has been driving tractor trailers for two years at the time of the interview. She emphasizes the importance of sharing knowledge on the waterfront and being willing to learn, such as loading sacks “back-to-front.” She describes driving lift trucks on the dock as “peas in a tin can,” which is why she prefers tractor trailers. She mentions a man named Tom Pennell, who trained all of the women currently working to drive tractor trailers. She says that it has become more crowded with trucks over the years, with more relaxed rules.

Section 16:16 – 19:05

In this portion of the interview, Cindy talks more about ratings and jobs. Her “multi” rating means that she has to take any job that comes her way, regardless of her preference. She describes the role of a hatchtender on modern ships. There is dual loading, and you have to monitor the load coming into the hatch to make sure that it is landed properly by the gantry crane.

Section 19:06 – 20:59

In this portion of the interview, Cindy describes the numbers of women working as longshoremen on the waterfront. Prior to a British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) program which assisted individuals into the industry, there were four female longshoremen. From the first round of the program in November 2002, approximately 20 out of 100 individuals that were placed were females, and they were working immediately. Cindy explains that it had slowed down slightly by the time she came on with the second round from BCIT in March 2003, as the work mirrors global shipping trends. September through December are notoriously busy in preparation for the holiday season, and it picks back up again in March for summer.

Section 21:00 – 22:11

In response to a question about labour conflict in US west coast ports, Cindy describes differences she has noticed different types of ships coming up to B.C., such as a ship with an “underground.”

Section 22:12 – 27:25

In this portion of the interview, the BCIT program is discussed more in-depth. It was a plan that was put together by the membership that involved three weeks of training, including how to drive lift trucks, WHMIS, mechanical aptitude, and standardized tests. Cindy estimates that out of approximately 750 people that passed the tests and ended up on “T-Board,” 300 made it to “A-Board”. She reported that for newly registered longshoremen work is so sporadic. Cindy and her husband often get to work on the same job nowadays. Her daughter is also a casual longshoreman in Stewart.

Section 27:26 – 30:25

In this portion of the interview, Cindy clarifies the use of “longshoreman” to refer to all longshore workers, including women. She explains that men started the industry, and she is willing to assimilate into that. She sees herself as a woman “playing up to” a man’s role in a man’s field. At first, women had to work harder than the men, but “not anymore.” Her

experience in construction had introduced her to working in a male-dominated field. More often than not, she says, men are trying to “keep up” with her.

Section 30:26 – 34:10

In this portion of the interview, Cindy details her involvement in the Local’s new education committee. It is a voluntary committee, meant to educate the casuals and other workers about the history of the local. She is planning a mural for the hall. She can envision herself on the local’s executive someday, and mentions there are currently female members of the executive. She describes women currently being heckled at general meetings, and notes this is one area where equality has yet to have been achieved.

Section 34:11 – 37:07

In this portion of the interview, Cindy discusses the idea of a “women’s committee.” It has been suggested in the past, to mixed reviews from the women. She feels that it is better to keep things co-ed, and notes it is easy enough to call up all the women in a group, if a situation arises. For example, she describes a domestic violence education program attended by women from several unions, which was “not a spot to drag men,” as they would be the minority. However, she says these events are helpful for the women, and they are also now equipped to help educate the men on these topics.

Section 37:08 – 39:25

In this section, Cindy describes her favourite and least favourite parts of longshoring. She loves learning something new everyday. She says that it allows you to “do what you want,” as you can go to school, work other jobs, go on trips, enjoy hobbies, and more, all while working as a longshoreman. She talks about a female professor down in California who was also a longshoreman, who wrote a great editorial response about longshoring. Her least favourite part is “getting old,” she says, because she worries about not being able to keep up as well in the future.

Section 39:26 – 43:00

In this portion of the interview, Cindy describes the satisfaction of becoming a member. While it didn’t change her category, she was able to choose more jobs, and was more involved in the union. She has volunteered for some union events, such as barbeques, and assists casuals during an open house. The education committee is also a part of the introductory process for new employees.

Section 43:01 – 46:22

In the last part of the interview, Cindy tells stories from longshoring. When Tom Pennell was retiring, he took his tractor-trailer “out for a spin” off of the docks, and caused mass chaos by “going AWOL.” She describes times of danger, such as the lid spinning off the hatch, or being under machinery. She also had an interaction with a sailor who asked her to buy him a rabbit, in order to make gloves.