

This interview is with Faith Johnson, who is a longshore casual with ILWU Local 502.

Interview Date: October 21, 2014

Interviewers: Michelle La

Date Range: 2005 to present

Sound Recording Length: 1:08:20

Faith Johnson is a longshoreman and the daughter-in-law of Dean Johnson (who also worked as a longshoreman in New Westminster and eventually at Westshore before he retired) and wife of Shane Johnson, also a longshoreman.

Section 0:00 – 07:29

- In this section of the interview, Faith describes how she began longshoring. Her husband Shane was a longshoreman, as was her father in law Dean. Faith is a “Prairie Girl” from Alberta originally, and knew nothing about longshoring before meeting Shane. Faith “got her application” to work on the longshore in 2005, but did not start working until 2010. She underwent training on logs, steel, and lashing. She started out on the “T board.” Since her group of about 1,000 new hires started working in 2010, she said she’s been very fortunate to have consistently gotten work, whereas the 750 people who got their applications before her experienced some work “droughts.” She said her luck in getting work these days is attributable to more commodities being shipped abroad.

Section 07:30 – 08:24

- In this section Faith talks about women on the waterfront. She said acceptance on the waterfront it has never been issue

Section 08:25 – 17:39

- In this section Faith talks about the sites she worked at and jobs she has done: Fraser Surrey Docks, the “Auto Terminal”, and Deltaport. When she started it was mostly Fraser Surrey and Deltaport, but now she spends most of her time at Deltaport. She has additional training over and above basic training, which includes a rating as a checker which she says occupies 99% of her time now. When the gantry is loading containers onto a vessel, Faith’s responsibility as a checker is to make sure they are the right containers. They check the exteriors of the “cans” (containers), and make sure that every can is accounted for. There are many types of checkers (eg. canopy, pre-gate) in the yard, and checkers up in the gantry who work with foremen and bomb carts. Work is generally with people on the same board, rather than in gangs nowadays. With ratings, you also get to know people from everything from T Board to members. She said the toughness of jobs changes from day to day. Sometimes lashing is difficult and sometimes it is not. Faith said the same about being “down below on steel,” which some days can be easy, and other days can be incredibly difficult. Faith cites the inclement weather as a reason why work could be made harder. Rated jobs are dispatched first, and there is a hierarchy of ratings. Top-side is any of the gantries and machine-operators that load and unload cargo, and top-side ratings are at the top of the hierarchy of ratings. There are three entry-level ratings, including checker, bomb cart and lift truck, and checker appealed the most to her.

Section 17:40 – 19:09

- In this section, Faith talks about the remnants of the gang system. It has changed a lot, though Faith said at Deltaport there still tend to be six-man gangs: four lashers and two stacker men for example. Down below on steel you could have four holdmen and two sling men. When you're working logs you've got four boom men and two holdmen. But typically, it's not the same men (or women) every day.

#### Section 19:10 – 24:59

- In this section, Faith talks about socialization on the waterfront, and the environment of the Dispatch Hall. It is still very social, even though it has changed. You still meet people that you have never met before. Some people tend to stick to the same shift all the time, so you do not see them. If they switch shifts, you meet them for the first time even though they might have worked on the longshore “for fifteen years” for example. She describes the hectic environment of the dispatch hall, where everyone is loud, noisy and talking. The dispatcher is also talking over the PA system. They start with members of course, but they do it by ratings first. So gantry and checker positions will get announced first. You can always tell when people are new at the dispatch hall. They walk into the hall differently and they are faces you haven't seen before.

#### Section 25:00 – 31:59

- In this section, Faith talks about awareness on the waterfront of her being part of the Johnson family. She tried her best to not be known as “Shane's wife” because anything she did would reflect on him. If people asked, she would say yes, but she would not volunteer that information at first. Some people knew her anyway, because she was married to Shane long before she started working there. People still talk about Dean, so she would not want to do anything to tarnish the Johnson name. But she maintains that it isn't all family connections on the docks, it also includes lots of people who were hired in the big rounds of hiring. There are so many people down there that it seems unlikely that there would be any preferential treatment, and Faith is unaware of any. Some questions people ask each other when they first meet include “What board are you on?” or “What ratings do you have?”

#### Section 32:00 – 35:48

- In this section, Faith talks about interactions with coworkers. Faith sometimes gets paired up with new people. New people are free to ask questions of more senior longshoremen, and, she said, they should tell the foremen they were new at that specific job that they are working that day. She said occasionally she hears people say, “hurry up” but she said it's the same kind of thing in all workplaces. She said there is not much teasing of new people because it makes the job harder for them, and at the end of the day it's about “safety first.”

#### Section 35:49 – 42:39

- In this section, Faith talks about mentorship and advice. Shane gives Faith advice from time to time, but she doesn't remember Dean having given her any advice. It tends to be about easier, safer ways of doing a job. She has worked with her husband before. She was a dockman when Shane was on an RMG (rail mounted gantry), about which the foreman teased Shane later. She said people earn respect, and people do that by working hard. She never experienced bullying.

#### Section 42:40 – 48:40

- In this section Faith returns to the topic of the dispatch hall and different jobs. Her worst job was doing a graveyard shift, but she and her coworkers had to finish the ship. It involved lashing an entire ship, and it wound up being 10 hours. Lashing involves lifting heavy bars and putting them into a lock to lock in the containers. The bars are 40 to 70 lbs. Her arms were pretty sore, and there was no break.

#### Section 48:41 – 52:00

- In this section, Faith returns to the topic of women on the waterfront. She agreed that it's easier for women to establish connections on the waterfront with other women, but they can't rely on that because there are so few women still. She agreed that there is some gravitation toward checking and "multi," but there are also some lift truck drivers who were women. In this section she also talks about the BCMEA-created video about women on the waterfront. She said there used to be a women's auxiliary, but she's not aware of a women's committee.

#### Section 52:01 – 59:45

- In this section, Faith talks about driving to work, getting membership in the future, and interactions of crewmen. She does not attend union meetings because she is still a casual. She says it may take a long time to become a member, and that membership depends on the amount of work is available and the rate of retirement. You start on the "surplus board" or T board, then work your way up to A board, then membership. She also spoke in this section about lunch. People generally eat in the lunch room, and almost never eat when aboard a ship. She sees crewmen all the time, but generally there is not a whole lot of interaction between the two sides—usually the foreman deals with crewmen.

#### Section 59:46 – 1:01:40

- In this section, Faith talks about what she likes and dislikes. She listed three things: her coworkers, the flexibility of the hours, and the unpredictable nature of the work. There is always something new everyday. She doesn't have anything she dislikes, but she said that cold rainy day down on steel are not pleasant.

#### Section 1:01:41 – 1:08:20

- In this section, Faith talks about miscellaneous topics. She is not aware of any harassment. Longshoremen have not gone on strike since she has worked there. She occasionally hears stories about the old days, and sometimes even stories about her husband Shane. She joked that she goes home after her shift and says "Guess what I heard about you today." Her son is now becoming a longshoreman, so she occasionally gives him advice. She does not feel nervous for her son.