

This recording is an interview with Bill Zander, a former mill worker and a carpenter who has lived in New Westminster for more than 35 years. The major themes in the interview are the development of New Westminster, his experiences as a mill worker and organized labour.

Interviewer: Andrea Walisser and Ken Bauder

Interview date: 21 March 2013

Date Range: 1940s - 2013

Sound Recording Length: 1:30:42

Bill Zander has lived and worked in New Westminster for over 35 years. Despite being offered a job in a bank after high school graduation, Zander left the bank and started working at Cap Timber. Working at the mill, even on union wages, was not considered a desirable job at the time, but he enjoyed the work and he was able to support his family. He eventually became a carpenter, and served on the executive of the provincial and national Carpenter Union for 18 years. Zander shares stories about the start of women working in the wood products industry, the changing downtown core of New Westminster and the role of unions in various labour disputes.

Section 00:00 – 5:59

Zander opens the interview by sharing the story of how he moved to North Delta at the age of 12 in 1946 and remembers New Westminster as a big city and a hub for activities in the region. He recollects the mills, the canneries, the flags on the various boats along the docks, as well as the busy farmers market that was supplied with produce from Queensborough.

Section 6:00 – 11:11

Zander talks about the deindustrialization of New Westminster and the changes he has seen in the city. He talks about the importance of the industrial sector and the activity the sector brought to the city core. He describes the various industrial organizations that were a part of the transitions on the waterfront.

Section 11:12 – 15:46

In this portion of the interview, Zander talks about how he entered the trades. He was offered a banking position after high school, but switched to the mill one year later as his friends were earning four times the bank salary at the mill. Eventually, Zander became a licensed carpenter, but never had an apprenticeship. He comments on how it was easier to enter the trades in his time, as many people would learn skills on the job, and not necessarily through apprenticeships.

Section 15:47 – 19:41

In this portion of the interview, Zander talks about the decline of the resource economy and the deterioration of the communities that operated on the water. What used to be industrial properties occupied by mills are now container storage yards. Zander has lived in New Westminster for 35 years, and has seen the changes to the waterfront, and the loss of activity in the New Westminster core.

Section 19:42 – 22:46

In this portion of the interview, Zander explains how he was on the environmental committee of the City of New Westminster and the president of the Carpenters Union both provincially and

nationally for 18 years. He explains that at the time, employment was often by chance. He started working for the union because he was fired from a job, needed to support his family, and took the first opportunity that presented itself. He reports that his parents immigrated from England and Holland in the early 20th century.

Section 22:47 – 28:50

In this portion of the interview, Zander talks about the changes to the environment that he has observed and the political environment around sustainability. He comments on the air quality in the Lower Mainland, climate change and overfishing. Subsequently, he tells the story about how he would fish in West Vancouver as a child, and the variety of species of fish that he would observe.

Section 28:51 – 39:11

Involvement of women in work on the waterfront. With union negotiated wages he was able to support his family, and his wife did not work. He describes how there was friction over the admission of women into the carpentry industry and unions. He moves on to talk about the rising productivity of the industry in the 1970s and the effect the introduction of technology had on the way they would build.

Section 39:12 – 49:31

In this portion of the interview, Zander talks about ethnic immigration to New Westminster and the immigrant involvement in various industries on the water. He explains how the unions were vital in the establishment of sport clubs and other social events through sponsoring. He tells the story about Saskatchewan Day and Alberta Day in Stanley Park.

Section 49:32 – 53:34

In this portion of the interview, Zander explains that most employers were considered fair. He explains this as being a result of their connection to the community. Most employers and workers had children in the same schools and the employers would have grown up in the industry. However, he talks about how the industry lost identity and closeness with increasing size and the introduction of outside companies in more recent times.

Section 53:35 – 59:25

The role of strikes. According to Zander a strike was the only tool the worker had to collectively make a statement to the employer about the labour conditions, compensation that correlated to cost of living, and safety. He states that as a manual worker, your labour is the only resource you have and that strikes keep people honest. He closes the section by discussing the Bentall Tower Tragedy (1981), where four workers died, and safety regulations.

Section 59:26 – 1:01:45

Talks about how First Nations people assimilated into the waterfront related industries. He states that he believes that the First Nations that were involved in fishing did not feel included in the fishing industry on the waterfront, as they were on reserves. However, they were involved with the mills and in the carpenters union.

Section 1:01:46 – 1:12:59

Describes the average 8-hour workday at the mill that started at 8AM and ended at 4.30PM. His duties as a forklift operator and a carrier driver included unloading trucks and bringing lumber to various parts of the mill. He discusses the lack of protection from health hazard at the mill and as a carpenter, as well as the risk from being in close proximity to asbestos.

Section 1:13:00 – 1:25:13

In this portion of the interview, Zander discussed the changing role of organized labour. He talks about the shift that came about with the effort to establish “right-to-work” rules, the loss of trade union recognition, and the passing of Bill 28 in 1984. He states that the industry lost continuity and health care benefits for its workers. He closes the section with a comment on the current welfare system in North America and the disparity of living standards.

Section 1:25:14 – 1:30:42

In this portion of the interview, Zander talks about the future for his grandchildren, and how he worries about the economic conditions and the environment. He states that he is positive about the potential for change that will rise from necessity.