

This recording is an interview with Fiona White, who worked for BC Tel for many years and is married to retired longshoreman Gerry White. The main themes in the interview are her connection to the longshore community through Gerry, her experience working at BC Tel and with the Telephone Workers Union, and her thoughts about the longshoring as an occupation.

Interviewer: Andrea Walisser & Michelle La

Date: 2 July 2013

Date range: 1960s – present

Sound Recording Length: 47:31

Fiona White came to Surrey as a girl, and eventually met longshoreman Gerry White on a blind date in 1964. At the time of the interview they had been married for 46 years have two children. Fiona worked for BC Tel as a service representative for many years, was active in the Telephone Workers Union. In her experience as a union member and leader, Fiona took inspiration from the longshoremen and other unions to push for improvements to her own workplace. Having been married to a longshoreman for many years, White shares some of her perspectives on the occupation. Her niece and son-in-law are also longshoremen today, and she comments on the differences in their career trajectories in comparison to her husband's.

Recording 1

Section 0:00 – 3:15

White was born in Scotland and moved to Surrey as a teenager. As an adult, she worked for BC Tel (now Telus) as a customer service representative, and was a member of the Telephone Workers Union. She worked for BC Tel between 1967-1970 and 1975-1998 before retiring.

Section 3:16 – 07:42

White discusses the work of her husband, Gerry, and explains how she met him on a blind date, and married him a year later. By the time of their marriage, Gerry was already a member of Local 502 of the International Longshore Workers Union, and most of their friends were from the longshoreman community. She talks about the longshoreman community, and mentions the annual August and December events.

Section 07:43 – 11:48

White discusses how the unionization generated company loyalty from families because of good working conditions. Her husband had flexible vacations and could work in Vancouver when activity was slow in New Westminister. She describes how the work patterns and the membership process for the longshoremen has changed since the 1960s, and notes that both her niece and son-in-law now work as longshoremen.

Section 11:49 – 13:49

White notes that the fact that she was a wage earner alleviated some of the stress around the uncertainty of work available for Gerry. When she returned to work in 1975 she worked part-time 9:00-14:30, from Mondays to Thursday and had her mother around to assist with the children.

Section 13:50 – 19:08

In this portion of the interview, White talks about her concerns for Gerry's safety at work, but had to get used to it, as it was a part of the job. White would never know if Gerry would be home on a specific day, as the longshoreman work was not predictable. She states that her children did not realize the privileges such as vacations to Hawaii and Disney World that came from Gerry's wages. Gerry enjoyed the variety of work in the industry as a first generation longshoreman, and was the vice-president and president of the union as well.

#### Section 19:09 – 27:52

White describes about how her experience with unionized work was different from Gerry's. She attributes this difference to the gender, and she describes the three division of the Telephone Workers Union. She tells the story of how they fought for a better seniority system for part-time employees by using clauses from other unions' contracts, and she was a part of this victory. She closes this section by talking about job-sharing and the changes that occurred when Tel BC became Telus.

#### Section 27:53 – 30:42

White tells about how her son became a longshoreman, but died before being initiated as a union member. She describes how the longshoremen would attend the funeral services wearing union jackets in a sign of respect, but believes that this sense of community declined as the union grew.

#### Section 30:43 – 34:00

In this portion of the interview, White considers how her knowledge of the longshore community benefitted her in the Telephone Workers Union. White was a shop steward, but eventually stopped being involved in the union, as she did not like the negative situations associated with it. Fiona's daughter now works at Telus, and is also involved in the union, having been influenced by growing up in a union-affiliated household.

#### Section 34:01 – 39:36

White talks about how Gerry socialized mostly with other longshoremen, and their son socialized with the sons of longshoremen. After her son's death, the life insurance from longshoring took care of her grandson and her son's girlfriend. Fiona talks about the differences between being a longshoreman and any other occupation as a single parent, using her grandson's mother as an example. She is the son of a longshoreman herself, and was in the lottery for a membership in the union, but White is happy she did not get it.

#### Section 39:37 – 44:32

In this portion of the interview, White talks about the increasing number of women in longshoring. She notes that this is in relative terms, as there was opposition for a long time from the original men, as they thought that women only worked for "pin money", and were not primary breadwinners. White talks about how the industry was not necessarily easy for the women, as they had to stand up against "a world of men", and lacked physical strength for the initial jobs.

#### Section 44:33– 47:31

In this portion of the interview, White talks about the various social events in the longshoreman community and among the Westshore Terminals retirees. She closes the interview by talking

about how she was able to retire early because Gerry was working at Westshore Terminals, and had freedom in terms of vacations and steady work.