

This recording is an interview with Lena West, a wife of now deceased longshoreman Helmar West and daughter of a longshoreman who participated in the 1935 strike. The major themes of this interview are the ladies' auxiliary and her husband's various jobs along the Fraser River.

Interviewers: Dean Johnston; Ron Noullett also present

Date: June 15, 2015

Date Range: 1935-1980s

Sound Recording Length: 2:32:57

Lena Zabloski West is an 87-year old former resident of Queensborough. She first met her husband, Helmar West, when she was only 16. Years later when she was a bit older, she met him again and wound up marrying him. Helmar was a longshoreman and a boatman. They had four children: Cameron, Christine, Robert and Lorraine. Lena was active in the longshore ladies' auxiliary. They would throw Christmas parties for longshoremen's children, and pensioners' dinners. She recounts a time in New Westminster's history when the Queensborough swing bridge still was in place, and the May Day festival was commonplace. In this interview, Lena relays many anecdotes about people she met as a longshoreman's wife and the sights and sounds of New Westminster in the past.

Section 0:00:00-0:15:35

- In this section, Lena introduces herself and talks about where she is from. She remembers that her father, a longshoreman, died in 1937. She remembers meetings that were "done very quietly" prior to the strike in the 1930s. She remembers the swing bridge connecting the rest of New Westminster with Queensborough. Her father stayed in jail because he "believed in freedom" and all that. Her father was not blackballed, but he was in a workplace accident. In those days, people worked together and relied on each other during the Depression. She talks about sharing vegetables with neighbours, including families of strikers. She remembers that Anaccis Island was just bush once upon a time. She remembers New Westminster's May Day celebrations where people would dance around a maypole. She said East Indians cleaned out their trucks and loaded kids from Queensborough and brought them to Queens Park for this.

Section 0:15:36-0:35:10

- In this section, Lena talks about her husband and her early work experiences. She worked at the Empire Cafe, and talks about her early work experiences. She also identifies people in pictures in a photo album (scans of some of these are included for reference purposes only). She relays a story about an attempted theft of a boat resulting in a scuffle between the owner, her husband Helmar, and the thieves.

Section 0:35:21-38:15

- In this section, Lena talks about Don Garcia, and the fishery. She remembers Don Garcia as someone who "knew how to talk" and yet was also "a very good listener." She also talks about the fishery, and eulachons including lighting them as candles because they were filled with oil.

Section 0:38:16-0:46:18

- In this section, Lena talks about her role in the union and the Ladies' auxiliary. Lena had a car. They had a children's Christmas party and a pensioners' dinner. They took the ages of the kids, went down to Mackenzie-Fraser to shop for the toys for the longshoremen's

children. One year she and another lady had to call 200 people to invite them to a party organized by the auxiliary. There would be dinner, dancing, and so on that would be organized. She remembers one instance where she argued with another member of the Ladies' Auxiliary about whether or not to donate money to children in South America or to cancer victims at Royal Columbian. She also recounts the time she met Terry Fox. The ladies' auxiliary also helped out with a Convention one year, and met many women from other Pacific Coast locals.

#### Section 0:46:19-0:52:31

- In this section, Lena remembered the good things about the union. She said there was a sense of brotherhood that she noticed. They also helped out the community. She remembers in Grade 4 or 5 the children received delicious apples and oranges. She said the Christmas parties for the kids were great times. She remembers one touchy situation where a longshoreman who was separated arrived at an event with his new girlfriend and not his wife.

#### Section 0:52:32-1:14:00

- In this section, Lena continues to look at pictures and describe them. She notes that her sister-in-law, Eva, married a "Romanian German." Lena describes a picture of cattle being shipped to Latin America, and another picture of an elephant being sent by ship to Australia. She also tells a series of small anecdotes relating to each picture.

#### Section 1:14:01-1:32:20

- In this section, Lena continues to look at pictures and describe them. She tells a story about how some Nordic traditions were passed on and continued to exist along the Fraser River among some, including a story about keeping silver in the mast of the boat, and giving away the first fish catch of the season for good luck. She also talks about Joe (Joel?) Pacquette (Placquette?). She speaks about mining in Coalmont, BC as well. She remembers the trifurcation project along the Fraser River. She also talks about the dykes in Queensborough.

#### Section 1:32:21-1:40:39

- In this section, Lena remembers New Westminster in the old days. New Westminster was quiet. Nothing was open on Sundays. She says that when the French guys wouldn't go overseas to "fight for the queen," some of them wound up in BC. She recalls stories from her brothers' service in the war.

#### Section 1:40:40-1:55:48

- In this section, Lena talks about how she and Helmar met. Lena just turned 16 and was wearing funny coloured socks. Helmar West was getting off the ship from his return from the war and he gave her a nickel and told her to call him when she was a little older. Later on, he saw her while she was working at Empire Cafe, and he walked her home. After that, they got together. In the summer of 1950, there were three strikes going on at once: longshoremen, fishermen, and one other that she couldn't recall. She went on to say that in October 1952, they got married.

#### Section 1:55:49-2:06:44

- In this section, Lena tells more stories. She recounts a story about being at the rec centre with several other people, including family members. Helmar won a prize: it was a bottle of whiskey. She talks about East Indian people in New Westminster, including Jack Singh.

Section 2:06:45-2:22:00

- In this section, Lena talks about the ladies' auxiliary a bit more. Cameron, Christine, Robert and Lorraine. Cameron worked briefly as a longshoreman, but wound up doing diving for the Fisheries. She talks about meeting Jacques Cousteau.

Section 2:22:01-2:32:57

- In this section, Lena wraps up the interview. They talk about the Reclaiming the New Westminster Waterfront project. They talk about a ship coming in, with dignitaries around, and no bollard to tie down the ship as it arrived. She tells a story about Helmar and Cameron helping a native fisherman on the Fraser River getting free after his nets got caught and caused him to be stuck in the river. She also tells a story about how Helmar lost his watch.