

INTERVIEW WITH ELSIE HANNON  
by Patricia Cooper

Patty: I see that you were born in Saskatchewan in 1909. Would you tell me a little bit about your childhood and growing up there?

A. I was born of parents who homesteaded in Sask. I was born in a sod shack. Sod houses built out of the sods of the prairie. I was always ashamed of that fact when I was little, I would never tell anyone, now I am rather proud of it.

Q. Why were you ashamed as a child?

A. Because I suppose other people maybe had houses built of wood and ours was made of the sod. But now I am proud to think that my father made our house and the barn and other buildings out of the sod. The old buildings stood there for many years and was finally used for a chicken house. And I have seen it many times since.

Q. Your father was a farmer?

A. My father was a farmer, yea.

Q. And your mother, she worked with him?

A. Oh yes, yes.

Q. How many children were there?

A. There were nine of us in our family. I had two sisters and six

brothers. Things were not always very rosey because we came through many hard times. We moved a couple of times, lived in different places. We moved to Tisdale, which was up in the bush country. We lived up in there/<sup>the bush country</sup>for seven years and moved by to Delisle again. And when my parents retired from the farm, we went to Saskatoon to live.

Q. And that was when?

A. They moved in there in 1942. Into Saskatoon and my father died in '44 and my mother continued to live in Saskatoon. She passed away in '55.

Q. Now when they moved to Saskatoon, were you still at home?

A. No, I had been out teaching. I went to teach a college and was teaching. And I was married in 1936 and lived at Kindersley. My husband worked with the CNR, the railroad and he was killed in a drowning accident in 1944. And then I came into the city, my father had already passed away and I came into Saskatoon and lived with my mother, until I was married in 1949 to my second husband, Gordon <sup>Hannon</sup> Hans (?).

Q. Well, let me back up just a little bit. Before you were married, you lived at home with your parents and I'm sure you did some of the farm work too.

A. No, I didn't do anything. I had six brothers. We didn't do anything outside except once in a while milk cows or something.

Q. Did you work with your mother then?

A. Oh yes, we worked in the house. We didn't do much outside because it was enough in the house to do.

Q. I would suspect that on the farm there were not a lot of the imminencies that one might today think of. What was some of the house work like? How did you do some of the...

A. Well, there was no electricity. Coal and wood stove. Coal oil lamps until we got later a gasoline lamp, which was a...and then at one time we had an acetylene lamp, which was...lights all over the house. And I didn't live in the years when they did their own spinning and all these sort of things. But it was always lots to do. Like your own bread was baked and you made your own butter and those kinds of things. There was always a big garden to take care of.

Q. Was there a school nearby that you attended?

A. Oh yes. I attended a country school to start with. And then we attended our town school, which was only a half mile away from us.

Q. And that was through high school?

A. Well, I took my high school in Tisdale, when were in the bush. Up in the bush country. And then we drove. We drove three miles then to school.

Q. So you parent's had to drive you?

A. Well, we drove ourselves. We had a horse and a buggy and a cutter in the winter. We drove ourselves to school. At one time, there were six of us going at one time, cause we were all in those ages.

Q. Well, I'd like to move then from your living with your family and going to high school. What did you do after graduation?

A. Then, I went to teach a college in Prince Albert. Prince Albert first and then in Saskatoon. I took my teacher's training, my first school was at Foxford, which was out in the bush. I was the second teacher there. There had never been a school there before. So it was very much in the wild.

Q. Where did you live? Did you live near the school?

A. I lived within a half mile of the school with a very nice family. And I taught there for two years and I came home to Delisle. Meantime, my family had moved to Delisle back from Tisdale and I taught at Delisle for three years. And then I taught at Brock and at Brock I met both of the men that I married. And I was married in 1936 to Albert Walman and we lived in Kindersley. He was drowned in 1944 in a hunting accident. He was hunting in the river, the Saskatchewan River.

Q. Did you continue to teach after you were married?

A. I substituted in Kindersley that was all. I didn't have a school steady. Whenever they needed a substitute, they would come around.

Q. You told me that your first husband worked for the railroad?

A. Yes, with the CNR.

Q. What did he do?

A. Well, he was in the superintendent's office in Saskatoon when he went on a holiday and was drowned in Saskatchewan. He was a great hunter and he was drowned. In the meantime, I had come in to Saskatoon and had gone to St. Pauls Hospital to work, in 1944, while he was working in Saskatoon. In 1944 in June, I went to St. Pauls Hospital to work.

Q. What made you decide to do that?

A. Well, I didn't want to go back teaching again and times were hard. We had come through the 30's which were very depressed years in Saskatchewan. And my husband had been off work for a year with a heart attack, with a bad heart, so I felt that I should go back to work. And teaching, I had dropped. The teachers were getting very low salaries and I didn't want to go back teaching again. So I went to St. Pauls and got this job and didn't expect to work very long. The sister said that well, if you can't stay very long

there's not much use coming because it takes three months to learn the office. Oh, I didn't wanna stay very long, maybe six months. She said well, it takes three months to learn the office so unless you sign for a year, there's no use in you coming. So I signed for a year, and I stayed for 31.

Q. How did you find out about the job? How did you know...?

A. Well, there's an employment office in Saskatoon.

Q. And what kind of work were you doing?

A. I was in the office. We admitted and discharged the patients. We did both.

Q. Did it take three months to learn it?

A. No, I was there a week and I had to work one Sunday all by myself.

Q. How did it go?

A. Oh, I learned. But there were a lot of things and then as the Saskatchewan government took more part in the hospitals and were funding the hospitals to a certain extent there were more things to do in the line of red tape and book work and reports all the time. It changed. It changed as it went along.

Q. How long were you working there before your husband drowned?

Just a short while?

A. From June to October.

Q. Did you have children?

A. No, we didn't have any children.

Q. How large was the office and who were some of the other people who worked with you when you first began?

A. When I first began, the office I had worked with... Olga Beely, Margaret Sineck, Marie Cumbies, were three and there were switchboards and Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. Bertha Edwards was on the switchboard at that time.

Q. Was the atmosphere fairly friendly?

A. Oh yes, yes. We were one big happy family in our office. The sisters were just friends with us. I loved everyone of them. Sister Moran was the sister in charge when I became a part of St. Pauls.

Q. And you were also Catholic?

A. No.

Q. No you were not?

What was your religious background?

A. I was Protestant. I was..united church when I went there, it later became a Lutheran. My first husband was a...well, no I was

Lutheran at that time because my first husband was a Lutheran.  
So I joined the Lutheran church. I'm still a Lutheran.

Q. Were there activities that this group, that you described would ever do outside of work? Did you ever meet each other somewhere else?

A. Oh yes. Especially the office staff. The ones who worked in the office. We had parties together and we went for coffee together and went to shows together and were very friendly.

Q. Were they married or single?

A. Some of them were married. Some of them were single and some of them are still single. Then after we formed our union that was our social life really. Once a month after our union meetings we always had a social hour, something to plan.

Q. That's something I wanna talk to you about now and that is where did the idea for a union come from and how did it...?

A. Stan Talbot was the International Representative in Saskatchewan and he came to St. Pauls and came into the office one day and asked how many people were interested in unions? No one in the office knew anything about a union. And he said that he wanted to organize and he had permission from his sister to meet with us. So a meeting was called and was held in the auditorium of the nurses residence right there on the grounds. The sisters didn't object and so he



told us what a union was and this union was Building Service Employees International Union, which was a union for service people, for people who are working in offices and for building and was not an industrial union. I didn't know anything about unions and sat on the front seat and asked a lot of questions. And because I had a big mouth, I was put on the first negotiating committee. We agreed to have our union and they insisted that we were certified and then we started to having our first contract. Our first contract was held in the board room of the nurses residence and we sat around a big table with all the sisters at that time. There were many, many sisters, the sisters were the head of every department in the hospital. Now it's going to be all lay people. Emmet Hall, who was a lawyer in Saskatoon...

Q. Okay, we will pick up where we left off with the first negotiating meeting.

A. Our first meeting we started at 7:00 because the sisters were quite religious and felt that this had to be something under God's direction, we opened every negotiation meeting with a prayer. They served lunch to us, it was served by the sisters and we talked a long time. Our first meeting ended at a quarter to twelve.

Q. At night?

A. At night. Our meetings were always from about 7:00 to a quarter to twelve. We had a lot to learn about negotiating. We

had to set up our first contract. That took a long time. As we negotiated further, the meetings weren't quite so long. But Emmet Hall, who was the negotiator for the sisters on their behalf was a lawyer and understood a lot of the fine points and helped us a great deal. He was afterwards the Attorney General in Canada. In the Federal Post. So we were very fortunate to have him across the table from us because he understood how we felt about things and it make it a lot easier. The sisters did not understand. They didn't understand that it cost money to buy clothes, everything was provided for them. They didn't know what it cost to live and a great many points by him helped us...these things are expensive sisters. Then later we held our meetings in the afternoon and not in the evenings and at one time, we held instead of just having one a month, or dragging on our negotiations, we held them every day for a week. It took us one week, that was our negotiations. Everybody who was on the negotiating committee was given time off from their work to attend this negotiating. And they were always very peaceful. We never had any trouble. We never had a strike in our...in St. Pauls unit while I was the president. I was second , Margaret Sineck was the first secretary and Mr. Gales, Fred Gales was the first president, but he only stayed in for 13 months and then I went in as the president and was president for 31 years.

Q. So what year did you become president?

A. Well, 1946 was when we received our...it was 1945 we were

organized. We didn't have our contract, but we organized and had our offices. So in 1945.

Q. Now who was Mr. Gales? What position had he held before that?

A. He was a worker in the hospital. He was a worker in the maintenance staff. And Margaret Sineck was in the office with me.

Q. Were most of the members of the union women? Or was it mixed?

A. We had more women employed than men. The men were the engineers and the maintenance and the orderlies. Aside from that the rest were all women.

Q. What about racially? Was it mostly white? Or white and black?

A. We had no...they were all...well of European...they were all white. We had no...

Q. What about various ethnic groups?

A. We had yes, we had your Korean, your Italian. I would say your Korean and Italian, German were the three besides our English-Irish.

Q. Did that cause any conflicts or problems at all?

A. No, we never had any problems about ethnics.

Q. Well, let me ask you this. One of the things that you said when the organizer first came to talk to you and he was explaining a little bit about the union and what it was like, what the union was, he made it clear that this was not an industrial union. Why do you think he said that and was that important?

A. Well, nobody knew much about unions and I think he made it feel that this was something that this would be something that would be very important to us as service people rather than a miner or someone like that.

Q. Also you indicated that the sisters did not resist this in any way. They were open to it. And yet they also had trouble understanding it.

A. They didn't really understand all our needs, but they did not fight the union. We had no trouble getting organized.

Q. Was it painful dealing with them in the negotiations...?

A. No, it was not painful. As I say when they first negotiated, I think Mr. Hall helped a lot because he understood our viewpoint and they...his word was law with them. They thought a lot of him and that helped a lot.

Q. Now the negotiations that you talked about--meeting first at night and later in the afternoon, is that all around the first contract? Was that first contract prolonged?

A. No, I don't think it was...I can't remember that it was so awfully long. I think later when we were fighting more about trying to get more wages and some of those, that took longer.

Q. What basically was addressed at the first contract? What were you aiming for besides recognition.

A. Well, we were trying to establish decent wage and the wages were so, when I look at them now, they were so very low. I don't remember what we used to accept, I imagine that we had some other contract. Mr. Talbot would have another contract to look at of what we should be receiving and I remember he talked about other types of work in the city what they were receiving at that time.

Q. How did you convince people to join the union? How did you go about organizing?

A. Well, everybody had to talk to everybody and we called a couple of meetings stating what we thought would be the benefits. And of course, Mr. Talbot did the talking because he was the one who talked. But, I don't think that it was any antipathy towards it because our wages were low, we had no holidays, we had no coffee breaks, we had none of the things we enjoyed later. And it wasn't hard to convince people that they would be better with the union to fight for them. If I was told when I first went...if my work was satisfactory and if they were satisfied with my performance, I would receive \$5 a month more after six months. After that, it

would depend on my performance. So everything depended on you yourself. And it depended on how they wanted to pay you or give you a raise. So there was no, you couldn't fight. If you wanted to fight about it, you were likely to be out. It was all on their side at that time.

Q. So people were very receptive at that time?

A. Yes, I would say they were.

Q. Were there any problems that you encountered initially?

A. Nothing, initially. No. And as I say, we were...our union was quite a happy family thing. We had weiner roasts in the summer and social after every meeting and Christmas parties and because I think we only had 80 or 70-something or 80 people to start with, it was just a family.

Q. That was the majority of people that worked in the hospital.

A. Oh yes. That did not take in the nurses of course. That was just the other staff.

Q. Included in what kinds of work? Not clerical work?...

A. That was clerical, maintenance, laundry, kitchen and it took in all of them, everything except the nurses.

A. Now this was our old hospital. It was a smaller hospital than in 1962, 1963. Our new hospital was built which increased our

attendance at meetings because we had a lot more people then.

Q. In the early days, how often did you meet?

A. Once a month.

Q. Once a month. And where was the meeting held?

A. We had difficulty in getting a place. We met in the lobby of in a little room in a hotel. We met for a long time in the YMCA building. We met in the basement of the Clock Bldg. wherever we could get a space. And finally, the sisters allowed us to meet in the auditorium of the hospital.

Q. After what, several years?

A. Yes, after we had our new hospital built. The old hospital we met in the cafeteria once in a while, but because there was no space to have a meeting, it wasn't that they objected to us meeting, it just was no places. Then when we joined with City Hospital to become a joint...we had joint meetings with them. And then we organized University Hospital and it was done by Mr. Thane and some of the members from St. Pauls, our office staff. Since some of our members had gone to University Hospital to work, that was easy to contact them.

Q. Well, let me ask you about that then. The union began at St. Pauls Hospital. And then moved to City Hospital?

A. Yes. City Hospital.

Q. When did that...about how long before....

A. The next year after City Hospital was organized in the next year.

Q. So that would have been in what? '46, 47?

A. In 1946. And it was Local 293. We were 287 in St. Pauls. That was our local union and City was 293. And then we had Mr. Talbot went around to some of the other towns, in Moose Jaw, in Regina and in Prince Albert and then we formed in 1947 we formed a joint council. That was all the locals that had been organized under Building Service.

Q. Now, as the union began to spread into these various locations, were you involved with organizing in any of those situations? Or did you come in and speak at some of the meetings?

A. Well, some of them. They would ask some of us to go and we went with the organizer and would talk and tell the advantages of belonging to a union and what it meant. We went to many of them especially the small towns around.

Q. Well, I wanted to ask you to. You became president of your local early in its history. Had you had any leadership experience before that. Was this a new role for you?



A. Not as anything to do with unions. No. Nothing at all.

Q. Were you nervous about ....

A. Well, I don't think so. I was not nervous about being in public. I had...because I had been teaching. I did a lot of concert work. We put on a lot of concerts in our church and in our organizations I was CGIT Leader for many years.

Q. A what leader?

A. CGIT, that Canadian Girls In Training. That's an organization of the United Church and we put on a lot of concerts. We did a lot of speaking in that regard.

Q. So you felt comfortable?

A. I was never nervous in public. Not after I grew up. By 1954 University Hospital was built and that's when we organized them.

Q. Did you organize them right away? As soon as they began...

A. Yes, they only had a few people working there when we first went in and as the people started...they were getting more and more people in as they opened up departments, we tried to contract each department. And we did this at their homes in the evening.

Q. Did they have their own local? Or did they come into your local?

A. No. They went into City Hospital local.

Q. Oh, into the City Hospital local.

A. Yes. Because Mr. Thane was helping the organizer really and that was his local because he worked with City Hospital. So then when we had the three hospitals in, we decided to change the name of our local and make it one local. And because it was three of us, we asked to have 333 for our number.

Q. About when was that?

A. That was in 1955. And we had the three hospitals at that time in Saskatoon in the Canada Building, which was just a building with janitors and so on and the YMCA.

Q. So, at that point, they joined Local 333.

A. Yes.

Q. Had they be organized before?

A. They were organized before, yes.

Q. And had their own local?

A. No, they were in with City Hospital local.

Q. So, City Hospital was evidently the larger one before the merger or not?

A. Yes, it was because I think they had more people than we did. But it was just because Mr. Thane was working at St. Pauls.

We really should have had the YMCA in with St. Pauls because I was the first one to bring that to the attention. I knew somebody who worked at the YMCA and decided that we should get organized over there.

Q. Tell me a little bit about that--organizing at the YMCA.

A. Well, this Ellis Armoraud, who was leader, one of our officers in 333 was working that was a friend of mine. I talked him into the fact that he should be organized with us because they were...they had very low wages at the YMCA. It was sort of a (what's the word that I want) charitable thing, the YMCA. So we got all the people who worked there, the janitors and this type of thing to come in. But because Mr. Thane was doing the organizing, he just put them under City Hospital. And many times mentioned that they should have been under St. Pauls, but it didn't matter anyway because we all became 333.

Q. Well tell me about Mr. Thane. How did you two first meet and how did he grow to be organizer? Tell me a little bit about that.

A. Well, I suppose that because he was working at City Hospital and City Hospital and St. Pauls after they were organized had joint meetings. We used to meet every two or three months together. Have a social together. I had met him because he was a union member.

Q. Was he an officer of a union?

A. Yes, he was the president of 293 of City Hospital.

Q. I was wondering if there was some...over this period of organizing I guess in the late 40s and then in the early 50s some other event that stand out to you--organizing in City Hospital, pulling together your merged union. Maybe you could talk a little bit about some of the guideposts.

A. Well, I don't remember that we ever had very much trouble. There had been no strikes or anything like that to us. Then a union was something to better ourselves, better those we worked with and because we felt we were going to be stronger by all joining together, we thought we would have more power behind us for these things. When we were negotiating, we negotiated separate contracts in all these places, but we had each other as a guide then. We could say what City Hospital were getting as wages and they would do the same with us. And I think we benefitted in that way a great deal. Then when we became 333, we felt we were still stronger because we had University Hospital, which was a teaching hospital and it was a provincial hospital. It was funded by the Provincial Government entirely. City Hospital was a civic. It was sponsored by the city and St. Pauls was a private hospital by the Grey Nuns. It was owned by them. So we had these three hospitals from three different backgrounds joining together.

Q. Was there a difference? They were so different, these hospitals. Did they react differently to the unions? Was it harder to deal with one institution in terms of bargaining and negotiations? Was one more sophisticated in terms of resisting the union?

A. I think perhaps that the sisters because theirs was a private hospital always had to refer back to their motherhouse for how much money they had and could spend. The City of course, depended on the city taxes. The civic organizations a little bit different. Of course, University, there was always the province part there and but, I don't remember that we all had so much trouble. We sometimes threatened to strike, but we never did. The first strike was carried on after I left St. Pauls. After I was no longer in office there.

Q. Do you remember some of the situations in which you threatened to strike?

A. When we weren't receiving the wages we thought we would receive. When we were first negotiating, our salary raises were so very, very small. We would get two dollars and a half a month. Five dollars a month was a good raise. One year, we decided that we had 48 hours when I first went there...our first contract...48 hours a week. We decided that we should come down to 44. So we did finally get it down to 44. And we thought we would like to have 40 hours was enough. And that was the talk throughout the country. But nobody had it. And City Hospital finally won it

with theirs. The year we got it at St. Pauls, we had to take the 40 hour week or a raise in salary and we met as a group and decided which we would do and everybody decided that we wanted the 40 hour week, so that year, we accepted no raise at all. We took the 40 hour week with no raise. It was never that easy after that. Because people tend to get a little bit more greedy then you want everything. You want more wages, and you want less working time, you want more benefits, more fringe benefits all the time. A lot depended on our organizers. Our organizers came and our business agents, each one of them wanted to prove that they were doing something for our union. And it became harder many times I think our locals themselves, the members, would have accepted less. But our business agents wanted more and would say no don't accept it. And gave us the guidance on that.

Q. Did you think there was a mistake (inaudible) ?

A. Well, I think it caused people to become more greedy and not be satisfied. I think many times, we would have accepted quite a bit less but then of course, times were changing. Everthing was costing more and wages were going up everywhere in all of their sectors. And the hospitals were low paid compared to some of the other organizations. Compared to industry and other things and we were always told of course that we could not judge hospitals by some of the...for instance, an office worker couldn't expect to get what a lawyer's office worker would get or a doctor of something

like that. So we only could use other hospitals as our guide.

Q. Did you have...as I understand it SEIU was of course by this time organizing all over Canada. Did you have much communications with other hospital locals elsewhere?

A. Well, when we had organized in Manitoba in Alberta, when we had our joint council, which had been formed, when we had our convention the locals from Alberta and Manitoba sent their representatives to our convention. And so wages were talked about and we knew what was going on in the other places. Then we had a representative sent every year sent to the joint council in Ontario. This took in the eastern provinces. Somebody from Council 22 came to our convention. So we had that cross section. Besides that, Mr. Hearn, Al Hearn who was our international representative was out some years for negotiations and kept up aware of what was going on in the other provinces.

Q. So you did have pretty close ties with him?

A. Yes, we did.

Q. Now tell me again, what year was the Council 15 organized? How did that exactly get started?

A. 1947, the Saskatchewan Jt. Council was formed. It took in at that time, the hospitals in Saskatoon and the Canada Building and the locals in Saskatoon, Swift Current, a hospital which was another city; Victoria and Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert

and the hospital in Regina. Now some of these later on withdrew from our union because at that time, there were other unions trying to form and there was a little bit of fight going on.

Q. Were they CIO unions?

A. Canadian Union Public Employees was the one that was our antagonistic foe and in Regina, Holy Family, Victoria Hospitals in Prince Albert became, well I would say that the union had raided them. Promised them more things, so they asked to be decertified and join that union and still belong to the union there, the other union. Now when we have had some negotiations with the other unions when we were now being funded by the Saskatchewan Government we did have joint negotiations and Building Service for a couple of years. I am not now aware of what they did the last few negotiations. But the last time that I was in negotiations, we negotiated together with them, but it was rather hard because we have a different philosophy than some of the other unions. Building service always thought differently and it was hard to negotiate the same.

Q. Explain that a little bit to me. How was the philosophy different?

A. Well, they are more industrial unions. They took in the workers in the...they're not all building service, they did organize hospitals but they also took in wholesale workers, the



wholesale people and that type of thing. They had could have miners, they could have anybody in their organization while we were more of just our building service. Somehow, they had a different philosophy than we did. We could tell that whenever we met with them. They just didn't think like we did. There was a difference.

Q. Can you give some examples?

A. They were perhaps more militant for one thing. More prone to strike. We were not a striking union to start with. We agreed more on negotiations...relied more on negotiations and talking things over. There was just something about it when we sat down to negotiate right at the very first time we negotiated with them, we did not agree on policy. Our contracts...the wording of our contracts were different.

Q. Were they more left wing? Were they communist? Or anything?

A. Well, it's hard to say that. You don't like to say that. It was just something different about them that we didn't care for some of the actions of some of the people.

Q. Well, I didn't want to get too far away from my original question and that was in the formation of Council 15 in 1947. It sounds to me as though it just, from there it just began spreading out into both Saskatchewan and Alberta.

A. To start with yes. We just Saskatchewan and then later on of course, we had organizers and business agents who were trying to organize throughout Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. And Edmondton was organized. The hospitals in Edmondton. We are principally...hospitals...we are in the healthcare field. Most of our organization was done with hospitals and nursing homes. Then Manitoba, the local that was found in Manitoba and so then we became the prairie regional council because we had locals in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The three prior provinces.

Q. So you adopted the name Prairie Regional?

A. Prairie Regional Council.

Q. And that was when in the 50s? Early 50s?

Q. Why don't I ask you a little bit about the healthcare industry since most of your experience is associated with the union in healthcare industry. What kinds of changes have you seen since 1945 or '46? In the Hospital industry?

A. Well, I would say that the one thing. Things became more mechanized. When we...I would say one big change of course was our wages and raises and the benefits we were able to...we had our extended sick time benefits, we had holidays and vacations, call back pay, overtime and all those things, coffee breaks.

The and relations plan was

instituted which we had to get.

Q. How did that work?

A. Five percent of our wages and five percent of the sisters, the sisters put in five percent.

Side Two

Q. We were talking when we turned the tape over about the super annuation plan, maybe you could...

A. Well, I believe that I said five percent of our wages were paid in by the employee and five percent the sisters add the five percent. This was the basis of our super annuation plan. There was many things that went on--uniforms were supplied and laundered, which had never been before. One thing which we really gained on was split shifts. At first people were working during the same meal hours and coming back maybe three times during the day. And within their eight hours, they were spending a lot more time. And the split shifts were removed and most of all in departments. Besides our work week being reduced, we had better conditions everywhere. We had a rest room provided and things that had never been given us before. But as we became more mechanized sometimes things changed. For instance, we had elevator operators in the old hospital and the operators were always somebody who had been perhaps ill or handicapped, and when we came into

the new hospital, the automatic elevator did away with those types of work. Finally, we were getting fewer places to place our people who were handicapped or that had been ill and were not able to, you know, do as well as if they had all their health.

Q. What could you do in those cases? Was there any...

A. Well, unless they could be placed somewhere else, there wasn't much hope. If we couldn't give them a place, what could you do for them. Sometimes you could find a job elsewhere. We were always concerned about these people and trying to help them.

Q. I assume that this change in mechanizing the elevators probably in the 50s.

A. Well, when we went into the new hospital, I would say in '63, yes.

Q. Did the union try to resist this in any way?

A. Oh yes. We fought against because we knew these people were going to be displaced. But we were always told you can't stop progress and it happened in many instances. Although, when we went into the new hospital there were so many more employees required that there were more places to fit a lot of people in that had been put out of these jobs because of mechanism. So there wasn't such a big loss there because we did have a few places where they were able to place the people that were not able to

do a full days work.

Q. Before the merger, before the creation of Local 333, were the contracts in the different hospitals slightly different that is, did some hospitals get certain things before others did?

A. Oh yes, yes. They did. And even when we were negotiating with a lot of the hospitals, one of the last contracts, yea. The last contract that I really helped with, this was going to December 1975 and the front page, this is a list of the hospitals that we represented. Saskatchewan. But because they were a little bit different, we did have, for instance at the back there was St. Pauls Hospital, some clauses were different so somewhere different, University was different. We had to make allowances because they were different.

Q. But this what 19?

A. This was 75, yes.

Q. But even in the 50s this was true?

A. Yes, it was true because they were every hospital is different. The people were called by different names. For instance, we had different...for instance in St. Pauls to start out with we had a gardener. The other hospitals didn't have a gardener. There were different...

A. We had different occupations and they had more machines, in

University when they started that we had had. They were becoming more mechanized. And so, you had to make some differences because of the types of work. Maids were mostly the same and even the maintenance because they were using different things. Even with our engineers, University Hospital had a...there was a central operating plant there, where some of the others had their own engineers. In some of the country small places, an engineer could maybe do orderly work or anything else. They were different and you had to...one man might have five or six jobs in a small place, so you had to class him with a different classification.

Q. You listed out several of the achievements of the union, things that you were able to win over the years and I'd like to talk a little bit more about it too. But which of these things come to mind did the hospitals resist the most. What did they fight you the hardest.

A. Oh, always wages. Wages yes. Because some of the other things were not...even our...well of course holidays and vacations and our extended sick time and all of those things were wages really. They were money too. For a long time we tried to, if we were asking for money, we tried to be a little bit easy on the other benefits. But I think people became more greedy and finally some people wanted everything. You have to have the benefits and the wages too. And that made negotiations harder.

Q. Were you in on negotiations throughout this period, throughout the 1950s and into the 60s.

A. Yes, I was on every negotiation since we started.

Q. Are there any ones that stand out in your mind? Particularly vivid?

A. No, I think each year brought its own problems and I didn't eat or sleep for all the time we negotiated. It always bothered me. I hated negotiations. I hated conflict and I hated the fact that you had to work with these people that you were sitting across the table negotiating with. That I think bothered me more than anything because always some of the people that were on the negotiating were office bosses or someone that we were working right with. And that little feeling as though you had to maintain cordial relations, which we always did at St. Pauls, but the feeling was there.

Q. So it affected your relationship with them during the rest of the year?

A. Not, I don't think that there was never any hard feelings. I don't think there were any every hard feelings because after we walked out the negotiating meeting and came back to our office, we were then employees on a different...and we could still go to coffee breaks with them.

Q. Did you ever joke about it at all?

A. Oh yes. I think I tried during the years that I was the president of St. Pauls to maintain good relations. I had very good relations with the sisters always. They were all my friends I correspond with a lot of them yet, but still have gone and I do think that really helped. The fact that I was never antagonistic with any of them.

Q. It sounds like from what you're saying that <sup>at</sup> City Hospital there was a bit more antagonism....

A. Well, it was different there. Because it was a civic union there. Well now we don't have so many sisters in St. Pauls and since it is all under government now there's lay staff practically. The sisters still own the hospital in way, they have the last word but all the departments now that were handled by sisters are with lay people. And now it's a little bit different, you're negotiating with lay people.

Q. What other kinds of differences? I mean that is a pretty big change.

A. Yes.

Q. How else would you characterize what that meant?

A. Well, I think that when you have a lay staff acting head, you have a different concept. Because the sisters were a religious organization and although they still wanted...they tried to have



a good healthcare, I think there...we always felt that there was a difference in our hospital with the sisters than in the other hospitals. Any of the hospitals and of course some of the country hospitals are like Moose Jaw, some of those are sisters too. But we always felt that because that was part of their life and their attitude towards life that there should be good healthcare and I don't think they saw it so much as dollars and cents as perhaps. For instance, when I first went there, the sisters were never paid. That was their contribution because of their vocation in life to take care of the sick. And they were not even paid. And after we negotiated, we started, I don't know just when along the line but they were finally given wages. Because it was only right that the hospital, the Saskatchewan Government gave a certain amount. That they did not keep that for their own private use, it went back into their organization.

Q. When did the government take over the hospital?

A. I'm not just sure either.

Q. Maybe after the new hospital was built?

A. Yes, I would think so. That they had more to say.

Q. I could find that out. Let me ask you a little bit about the relationship with the International. I know certainly there were

International Conventions and you did attend? Were you a delegate (inaudible)?

A. Trying to member if I ever was or not.

Q. But there was contact...

A. Well, yest it was contact. When we, every convention we always invited someone from the International to come, like I had pictures with Mr. McFetteridge.

Q. This picture that you had showed me before, where did this take place and what were the circumstances behind this?

A. Well, that was at an International Convention and I don't know just where it was, whether it was in Chicago or here in Washington. or where it was. It seems to me that it was in Chicago. I've kinda forgotten.

Q. Looks like late 40s, early 50s?

A. Yes, it could be. I was not at this but Mr. Thane was our representative then to this. Mr. Hearn was there from Canada too. But we were interested in this because he told us this after he came back and made his report. That when they were ready to start the convention on the platform was an American flag and Mr. Thane rose and asked for a point of order. He said there was no Canadian flag on the platform and that he refused to be sitting there carrying on with this meeting until it was a Canadian flag.

So they had to hold up the proceedings of the meeting until somebody had to go out and buy a Canadian flag somewhere. Find one at least. And so, when the flag was brought in after the meeting, we had a picture taken standing in front of it

Q. I wonder if that incident reflects a larger pattern. Do you think that the Canadian somehow felt more marginal and was that an issue or point of contention.

A. That was typical of Mr. Thane, I would say. I don't think that I would have noticed it. Perhaps I wouldn't have. I would have been too excited about something else. But he was very Canadian and I think we all felt that. We are a nation in our own right. And we are proud of Canada. I think he felt that too, well, we were not going to take a back seat to anyone. So we wanted to be represented by our flag at least. But we were always glad to have someone from the International come. Many times we tried to show them honor and maybe get them a little something as they left, but we were very pleased to have them at our conventions because it added something and they could bring us a greeting from the International and tell what was going on. Then after Mr. Hearn became the vice president then it was he who always came and would bring us greetings from the International.

Q. I meant to ask you a little bit about that. I know that

he was elected as a vice president, but as I understand it, there was certainly feeling that perhaps Joe Thane would also have been a likely candidate for that office.

A. I don't know. He was the International Representative, Mr. Thane was as Mr. Hearn was too. Then Mr. Thane of course, left the building service and he was with the Carpenters union, I believe now, I don't know just what union that was, but that was it was the Carpenter's union anyway. He had been a member of them as a Carpenter, but he was their representative for quite some time.

Q. Did you ever...were there other people in Canada that you also hope would become part of the International Executive Board?

A. I don't know.

Q. What about the role of women in the union? Do you think...what kinds of opportunities were available for women?

A. Well, we had more women than men in our union and we always had some women as officers. We had women as officers of our council always. Let's see, I was the president, Mrs. Edridge was the secretary of our council, so that was two right there. We had them on our executives, there were always women on.

Q. At least on that level, you didn't feel that there were any obstacles?

A. No, no.

Q. Was there any sentiment among you? All of you women?

That the International should perhaps have more women?

A. I don't think that that ever occurred to us. And when we had a representative come from Council 22 from the east, it was nearly always a woman who came. I think of that over the years it was nearly always a woman. We've had both men or women sent there. We had more women than men come and I believe the same thing, you see there were hospitals unions there and they were principally women. Whenever you have you have a hospital. So that's why it's both because their membership is mostly women.

Q. I'd like to know a little bit more about the relationship between the local, later 333 and politics in both the city and throughout the province. Was there active participation...?

A. Well, I wouldn't say that they were are as active as perhaps or some of the other unions. But it was always that that undercurrent was there that we should certainly get out and help because we had such a varied ethnic group. Sometimes it makes the difference in your voting patterns too. Everybody is not always for the same political party. And although we tried to support the party we knew that was going to help us, I don't think we did it as openly perhaps and as freely as they do in the states. Partly because we were a younger organization and

partly because of the feeling right within the unions themselves. For instance, if you got up and said, now you should vote for this coming election for this certain man, he's going to help. Perhaps you are going right against the person who sat in the front row who was that was not his philosophy at all. So it was always done on a little bit more quieter basis. But we did help, we always tried to send some of our own members to be clerks and returning officers when an election was being held. We did have several of our meetings before elections we had members, different members from the different parties come and speak to us. We did that for several years. Yes. So that the people could hear what they had to say and what they had to offer to try to educate them.

Q. So that might have been a way around this divisiveness?

A. Yes, to try to make them see well, is this one going to help us more than another without actually laying down the law, which you cannot do.

Q. Did you every endorse anyone of the joint that you remember? Say your local?

A. No, I don't really believe so. Not as a local. As individuals of course we did. Of course some of these men came to us knowing that we were behind them and I always tried to tell them that we are behind them as individuals but as a local we didn't. That was our own local, now I don't know about what they did in some

of the others.

Q. So there wouldn't have been necessarily an official campaign contribution from the local?

A. No,.

Q. Individually you did.

A. Individually yes.

Q. Were there specific legislation that you can remember over the years that you personally or the local was concerned about either on the city province or national level that you may have to work to win or defeat?

A. Well, we went to Regina a couple of times and met with their parliament there. One was the closing of St. Pauls Hospital They were going to close the hospital because there wasn't the... the government figured that they couldn't keep all these hospital open. And so they were going to close St. Pauls. We went...the representatives then went from our hospital in the city and from our union. I went from our union. And we met with the Government to say why we thought that our hospital should not close. And it was not closed. We won on that. That was one time that we went. When we were trying to get the 40 hour week instituted, we had a representative go to Regina for the 40 hour week. We have the 40 hour week in our province then. It's been made law. There has been many, Mr. Thane did quite alot of work for us in that

regard. He would meet with the officials in Regina and he was our International Rep. I don't have any of his correspondence or anything but.

Q. Well, I wanted to depart from this just for a moment because I realize that there were some other things that I wanted to ask you about. Sort of nonwork, nonunion topics and then we'll come back and summarize a little bit with you and your union career. You met and married your second husband in the late 40s.

A. I was married in '49.

Q. '49 right. How did you meet him?

A. I met him and my first husband both while I was teaching at Brock. It was only a short ways from Kindersley. My first husband was there doing some work with the CN and while I taught at Brock, my second husband farmed only a few miles from Brock. I then met them socially. His wife died in St. Pauls Hospital while I was in St. Pauls after I had come there, just a month after I had lost my husband. Because we had known each other, we sort of sympathasized with each other and corresponded and were married in 1949.

Q. What was his occupation?

A. He was a retired farmer. He was a former captain then and then he retired and came to Saskatoon.



Q. So while you were being president of the local and being a very busy person, you were married?

A. I was married my second time yes. He never interfered in any thing that I had to do. I dragged him to a lot of union things that he didn't wanna go to because he was a very shy person and didn't want to sit at the head table. He never objected to my going and in fact went to a lot of our, when I went out of town to the convention he went with me.

Q. He did?

A. And was always very proud of the fact that I was the union president. Although he didn't wanna take any part himself, he always helped me in any way that he could.

Q. What was he doing those years?

A. He was retired from farming, but he worked as a night watchman for one of the companies in town, General Motors and then he was the sixth in that Grace United Church for four years. After that, he had a heart attack and the last three years of his life, he was not able to work.

Q. I'd like to know a little bit about this, working full time and being a union person, how did you bear house work and everything else?

A. That didn't take up all of my time. I was very active in

church.

Q. Oh, well tell me a little bit about that.

A. I was the superintendent of our Sunday School for 18 years. I was in the choir and in our Ladies Group, and helped wherever I could in our church. Those things I did while I was still working. Sunday School was sort of a smozzle (?) on Sundays. I would go to work at 8:00 and work until Sunday School time, then I tore across the city, I had to get someone to work for me for an hour, and I would tear across the city for opening Sunday School and come back and finish up, so I was able to carry this on. But I didn't wanna drop our Sunday School work and it worked out alright. After a time, I had a helper in the office, there were two of us working and then she replaced me while I went to Sunday School. Then I worked for her.

Q. Were there other organizations that you were involved with besides the union and church?

A. Well, not quite at this time. I had been before. Before I ever went to work, I was in several organizations like Red Cross and those types of things. While I was president of the Council, it took a lot of time too and I was...because there were always things to do. After my husband was gone in '62, he passed away, then I went on our Church Council and I have been on it every since.

Q. That's a governing boarder of the (inaudible)

A. Of the church. I am president at the present time of our Ladies Group. I am still in the choir. We had a hand bell group and I am in hand bells now. Just a little bit of something on the switches.

Q. Well, I'm curious to know too about keeping house and shopping and all those things that one has to do to keep the household functioning during the 50s.

A. Well, I have a three story house. I had, when we were first married there were roomers and boarders, when we bought the house. So, I took them over. For a year I had six boarders. Now I don't know how I did it. Most of the work was done in the evenings, my husband looked after things at noon but I was there for breakfast and supper. At the end of that time, he said that that was too much. We wouldn't do that anymore. We finally just had roomers. So I have, over the years had university students with me because I wanted to help. I have had two of my step-grandchildren. My second husband had two sons. The oldest one is married and has six children. So I had step-grandchildren. My youngest step son died of a heart attack two years ago. Anyway, we have had people in the house and light house keeping rooms so that I didn't have to look after them any more. But I still had the house to look after.

Q. You had your own work to maintain?

A. I had my own work and I had to kind of look after them too.

Q. Did you do your grocery shopping after work on the way home or weekends,?

A. Yes, sometimes. Sometimes at noon but what I couldn't do sometimes he did.

Q. Did he help with?

A. Oh yes, yes, he always helped me. He was not a good cook, but he learned to make a good tomatoe soup. He learned to do what he had to do. It was a big help. He would on those kinds of things which helped too.

Q. Did it ever seem like a balancing act between doing everything else you were doing, and doing work and union activities?

A. Well, I sometimes wonder how I kept things separate in my mind. I used to them, I'd get up at union meetings, don't be surprised if I start saying something that belongs to Sunday School because I had a lot of these things in my mind. Seems to me that I was always making up a speech for something or other. And I always had this feeling that it would be terrible if I gave the wrong thing at the wrong place. I don't think I ever did.

Q. Well, I guess I wanna ask you a couple of, what I'll call more

reflective questions. Can you as you look back over your career, and your work, can you isolate a couple of times where you would say were most discouraging and other times that were most inspiring and made you perhaps feel the proudest?

A. Well, I don't know. I would say as I look back on my life I've had a very full rich life. I think loosing my first husband was a terrific blow. A trauma that it took quite a while to get over. I think one reason that I threw myself into union work with so much energy was to compensate for that. Then I had lost my father and I was looking after my mother too. I was living with her and my oldest brother had been released from the Air Force so I had the home life there too, even after I had lost my first husband. But, I think there were many times that I wondered if well was everything worthwhile or not, but still there was some kind of a driving force there that I felt. I was interested in union work and all the problems that you have to face, everybody's problems, somehow I was given the strength to carry on and I did. And I think the only time that I might say that I was discouraged you had to fight for somebody else and it seemed like a loosing battle and you thought you weren't going to succeed. Perhaps that's a downer. And there were a few times, we didn't succeed in every grievance that was processed and sometimes we would feel very down about it. but for the most part, I felt quite satisfied with my years as a president in the hospital.

Q. Are there some moments that come to mind that make you feel sort of inspired or reminder you of the pride that you felt?

A. Well, I think the fact that the sisters always made me feel good. I was, when I was married the second time something that I have always felt very proud of, the sisters made and decorated my wedding cake. It was a terrific thing. I have never seen such a beautiful wedding cake in my life. The sister who decorated, that was here field. And I thought that was something, cause I don't know if they ever did it for anyone else there. There have been a few little things like that. We used to take the sisters out to the farm when they went to have a picnics, we used to have meetings at Biggar, which is a little town about 20 miles out or 30 miles and my husband and I used to take the sisters around and you know, had a real friendship with them. And they always made me feel that I was...well, they made me feel good. I think that's one reason I stayed so long. Not that I felt that I was that important, but that I enjoyed being with St. Pauls. I enjoyed those years. They were years, that after I thought that I would pursue a career and I was just a housewife, now suddenly I was in something different. I never expected to stay that long there. And I suppose this helped keep me young.

Q. Now you retired in 1975? From?

A. From St. Pauls, but I went back just on call whenever they needed someone in the office for a year or so, I would go.

And what about the union? Were you still active with the union, even after your retirement from St. Pauls?

A. I used to go to meetings once in a while whenever they have something of their Personnel Association and I was the secretary-treasurer of the Personnel Association in the hospital. I am a life member of that, so whenever they have something I get an invitation to go.

Q. So, those activities and your church activities have kept you busy until 75? You probably have no free time.

A. Not very much.

Q. Well, one other question that I have to close for now and I'm going to have a thousand questions in a week, but as you look back over all of your work with the hospital and the union what comes to mind as some of the most important changes that you have watched unfold? What strikes you the most?

A. Well, I think better working conditions was the greatest thing. The fact that people were..well the raises and wages might have come slowly through other means, but the fact that you could negotiate these makes you feel that you really help bring them about and that they had better holidays, time off, well, just everything was better for them than it had been when I first went there. When I was first at St. Pauls some of the people who were working there were not paid at all. They were working off

hospital bills. They had had hospital bills during those tough years and they couldn't pay them, so they were hired simply to ...they would work until they paid off their bills.

Q. Did they get food or meals?

A. Well, I suppose they more than likely got the meals there. Because there was a cafeteria and we all had our meals at the hospital. In '44 when I went there, just past the Depression of the '30s and the early '40s and you know, everything was tough. It was wartime and of course, after the war, I suppose, the war has always changed things too. But it was nice to know that that was no longer done. People didn't have to do those kind of things.

Q. What are some of the other things about the initial working conditions that you saw, not only in your own office which was fairly clerical, but among the other employees. What were some of the worst conditions?

A. Well, the fact that there were long working hours and they were working for low wages, they had to provide their own uniforms, there was nothing like that provided. There was no time off, there was no breaks, no ten minutes breaks, or anything like that. There was no restroom to go to. And well, there was product of the future, like super annuation plan or anything like that. There was no job security, which was the big thing. If you didn't perform you were fired. There was no recourse. There was nothing you could



do about it. And I think getting the job security was one of the big things that we did accomplish with our union. The fact that we had a means of protesting even though perhaps you didn't get your job back, but it had to be something pretty terrible if you didn't. Because you has somebody to fight for you. That of course, was the biggest thing because a lot of people are not fighters, and if they did protest, they would just loose their job.

Q. Would you characterize yourself as a fighter?

A. Not for myself. I would never fight for myself. I would never fight for in fact...I was asked one time to be head of the office to be the supervisor in the office, but I refused it because I didn't want to be earning more than the girls I was working with. I just refused. I said no, I didn't wanna be classed as that, I wanted to be classed with them. I was also asked to take another supervisor position which would take me out of the union and I refused that. I would have had twice the salary, but I still wanted to be in the union. But to show where I was, I was not just working just for money I guess. That was the feeling I had about it. When it came to fighting for other people, I was quite willing to fight. AS I say, all the fights I had were never for myself. They were always for somebody else. And sometimes only one or two people there's always one or two people that cause more trouble than all the rest. Sometimes we didn't win the fight, sometimes we did.

Q. Any questions that spring to mind that you would have asked if you were me?

A. Well, we done a lot of talking here now.

Q. We have and we will get another opportunity, but I wondered if there was anything now, that was sort of on your mind.

A. This is nothing to do with our union, but I think a little something that made a difference. When I first went to St. Pauls we had a nursing school. We had a nursing school at St. Pauls and one at city hospital and I think nearly all of them had nursing schools and the nurses....

Tape Two - Side One

A. The school took three years. The girls came in to train for a nurse and the first year we didn't see much of them. Probationaries...then the next two years we saw more of them. There was something about the nursing school that was familytype thing. And the feeling that those girls had for St. Pauls was something that you can't describe the same that I think any school that you belong to. They graduated after three years, but during that time, they used to have concerts and they were always coming around selling tickets for something. We had a lot of contact with them. Their graduations were held down in the auditorium downtown someone, in the theatres somewhere. They were always...they were beautiful.

They had a school song and a school yell. There was something.. we somehow felt a part of that. Then after the school was closed... the school was closed after a time and I'm not sure of the year. But now they are trained in a different way. They have an institute called Kelcy Institute and they part of the university and part of this practical training and they come to us just for the work that they have to do. Now they must do their practical training so they come. And we didn't get acquainted with them the same. And they themselves didn't have that same feeling, that school spirit that this is our hospital. And I think that this sort of spilled over into everything. Because it wasn't that same unified feeling and I don't know how Cith Hospital felt about theirs, I never talked about it. But we all felt that, we thought it made a difference in the nursing quality themselves, even though they were still under the sisters, they were not, the sisters were not that figurehead. Of course the nurses are now organized too, so they have their own union too. For a long time they weren't unionized either and didn't appreciate us getting something and they didn't.

Q. Okay, well thank you very much I really appreciate your help.