

FIT TO BE TIED: 22:20 February 19, 1995

NARRATOR:

REWRITE INTRODUCTION currently 30 seconds...

JEAN SHEILS:

My earliest recollections are going with my dad a gunny sack. I remember one time my father looked in that bag and there was rotten cabbage and fired it back. People would work very hard to get away from that. It wasn't a very nice thing to go into the store with scrip, which was what relief was in those days, when you went to pay your bill everyone knew you were on relief. In Vancouver in those days, 60,000 households were on relief. I remember once we got some clothing and they were wonderful, they were brand new until we really looked at them and they had taken a scissors and made a cut in them so they weren't really have anything new.

MRS. FORDHAM:

We had no money, we lived in a little house on Sixteenth Avenue, near Fraser. Bailiff came up one day, so I went out the back door and ran up onto the front verandah, I wouldn't let him in. "Mrs. Fordham, I have twelve dollars for you."

"Its no good to me!" I said, "You get me a house", I said, "and I'll move, but I can't get one", I said, "especially not for that money!" He said, "We'll come and put you out!" I said, "You'd do that, wouldn't you! My husband went overseas and you'd come and dump him out on the street, eh, that's a nice way!" (Pauses)

JEAN SHEILS:

My father had built our home, we had moved in, and there wasn't any work, so he had taken a mortgage out to build another house to sell. And during that period he was also Workers' Unity League organizer for the miners in Princeton and when they arrested him and put him in jail, my father wasn't able to earn a living to pay off the mortgage.

It was a nice home. We had a hardwood floor, fireplace, Pembert bath, wonderful neighbors. It's kind of sad to leave something like that, I am sure it was much sadder for my mother.

MRS. FORDHAM:

Arthur Evans, lovely home. They had the Mounties all round there. We went there and picketed there and made meals for the men that was picketing for weeks, but they finally came, surrounded the place with motorcycles and evicted him. He came on bad times same as everybody else.

SHEILS:

They came and got me out of school and there was the sheriff's van, the police, the pickets and my mother and they went into the home and removed everything that was ours: furniture, clothing, dishes, and packed them into a van and drove them off--and took my mother and I and put us in a hotel on the skid road.

EFFIE JONES:

We had snow on the ground. And a woman was sick and her husband had been in the merchant marine and he was drowned. She was there with two girls and they were putting her out and there was an older couple living in the basement. They called for me, I was the only name that anybody knew, they saw so much publicity in the paper, how I would fight them. So the day of the eviction, a lot of the League women went down. We had contacted an awful lot of people. We had a wonderful picket line, people in fur coats, not from our way of life, I'm sure. The sheriff went down to get reinforcements--he'd been there and gotten all the furniture out with these two men, goons they were that they had imported from the States, 'cause nobody in Vancouver would do it.

I explained to the crowd, about two hundred that had gotten in front of the house, I said, "Now we want help, come on all of you!" They all came, I've never seen anything like it and we got everything in no time 'cause there were so many there. In all the fuss and bother we forgot the old couple at the bottom. We saw this stove out on the sidewalk and this man came forward, an old man, he said, "It's ours, they put us out."

I remember saying, "Put the stove on, and turn the pipes so that the smoke comes right on the pathway." We made the biggest fire that you ever saw. Two men that were working with the sheriff could not get through the smoke. All these people there, the crowd put the old people's stuff back.

MRS. FORDHAM:

I had a boy friend in the old country and he broke it off with me-- after four years, he broke it off with me! Broke my heart, he really did. And that's why I came to Canada, I wanted to put the ocean between us.

When my baby was comin' I never knew. My mother used to say your back opened and shut and I used to feel, there, in the back and say to myself, well there's no way it could come there, or they'd open your navel up. That's what I thought and I didn't know until he was coming and I was twenty-four! You gotta find a place to live and support yourself and have your child with you and everybody looks down on you.

RUTH BULLOCK:

I was very hard on women, I thought women made altogether too much fuss about giving birth and I was going to show the world how this was done. After midnight the doctor came and then there was a real tussle to have my baby born. Ed Mathews was annoyed. If the child had been a son he would have been very pleased with it and would have taken to it, but since it was a daughter it was still my child and I had better look after it. I was fit to be tied. I was so damned angry.

NARRATOR: (rewrite)

Birth Control and abortion were illegal in Canada during the depression. Many women died in childbirth and from abortions they induced with slippery elm (herb) and knitting needles. With support from the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, a brave band of women went door to door, risking imprisonment, in impoverished rural communities. Visiting homes with fresh diapers and children's clothing on the line, they dodged the church and police, and begged post masters to deliver condoms or diaphragms, by mail.

RUTH BULLOCK:

My birth had been so horrific that I was never able to carry a child again. I became pregnant but I would lose a child within two months. So, I had to fight with my doctor to get a pessary so I would not repeat this problem. He said, "Mrs. Matthews, when you have had four children, come to me, and I will cheerfully give you this information, but you're a young woman and there's not reason why you should not have more children."

I did persuade him and I was fitted with a pessary, which was a diaphragm type pessary, which cost me twenty-five dollars, which was a huge amount in those days. A few years later, I met with Vivian Dowding, who was working for the birth control movement at great personal peril, because in those days it was not even legal to give birth control information to married women, let alone any woman. Incidentally, I discovered that the pessary with which I had been given could be bought from the Kaufman Rubber Company for thirty-five cents.

MRS. TAGASHIRA:

I came to Canada in 1927. I'm tomboy, so naturally I go. I hadn't met my husband yet but I'll go. You know Stave Lake, we went over there and then we had three miles to the top of the mountain, a little trail, hardly any trail, we had to climb up over there to our destination and there was about three families were there, so that was my new home in Canada.

My husband would go to the day work and on the week-end we cut shingles, we cut big timber and then I cross cut in between and the saw was ten feet long. But that also alot of fun. We had a lot of dream.

A year later my husband passed away and I had to work. My mother was asking me to come home, but without money and with two kids, who wants? I should never go back, because once I left home I should never depend on them. Some days spring time would come into my life, then I would come home but not now, because now I just could not smile, so I would not come home.

In the meantime, United Church had orphanage in Victoria--they could help me to look after one of my childs. Without any payment. That was really grateful that I felt. What a wonderful way to be Christian. But when we parted that was the hardest time. He said, "Mama, when can I come home," that was the hardest time I ever had. I said, "the minute I can make a home for you, you will come home together."

Then I told the Minister's wife, I think I should learn some English, somewhere, somehow. So then he introduced me to wonderful Christian home, and there was couple, very honest Christians called Mr. and Mrs. McConkey. And they treat me just like own daughter. I was thinking about the future and Mrs. McConkey and I went to

the Academy of Useful Arts Sewing School on Pender Street then after I come home from school, I do the housework. Meantime Mrs. McConkey help me to look after the baby. (pause) I had to bring my boy home. One day I met Mr. Tagashira. He was good to the children and when they growing up he wanted them to go to school.

NARRATOR: (rewrite and condense)

Families could not afford to feed their young, there were few jobs and no welfare for single unemployed women, whether separated, divorced or widowed. The media shunned any woman who did work for taking a family man's job. Forced into work as domestic servants, women earned as little as five dollars as months. Mildred Duggan, a union organizer stated, "Employers are looking for bargains in maids just like store shoppers." The Vancouver Sun, in a surprising statement of sympathy asserted, "In some Vancouver homes the wages of domestics are lower and their hours of work longer than anywhere in the world."

ALICE PERSON:

My father and mother separated--she left thinking that she could make a living in B.C. on a fruit farm cause there was a lot of propaganda about it, you can grow strawberries and the kids could pick them...and we had enough money to carry us through besides paying for the place til spring and then she started the fruit but she had to apply for welfare of some sort cause we needed some money to buy at least bread,. If she has a decent price for the fruit she wouldn't be asking for welfare.

But in her fight for welfare she says, "Well there's easier ways of dying than starving to death." That became the headlines of the Vancouver Sun. She got the \$35 dollars a month. Well I was upset because people were teasing me about welfare and I come home and I was crying and she says, "You're as good as the queen, she's on welfare too."

I worked that summer when I was 13 and I never went back to school. I was on a farm and she just demanding, I'm telling you, I worked and worked, I washed milk bottles, I scrubbed the tables, I scrubbed their benches, and they were coming from the barn you could smell the barn. You had to keep the floor clean, do the cooking, make their breakfast, prepare for dinner, prepare for their supper, and it seems to me there was a big table of men. Soon as she had

someone willing to work she didn't help you, didn't do anything-- And yet she was just a poor woman, there was no reason for her to do that to anybody. So, I had lost a lot of weight and in the morning I would wake up and there would be a pile of blood that had gelled on my pillow, from bleeding, cause I was too tired to wake up. The hours were just too long, you were on your feet too long, you were just too young.

So that fall I got a job with the Row Holland's. I was a servant, I was in the kitchen, they rung the bell for their breakfast and they rang the bell for their supper. You brought them the bedpan in the morning and their breakfast in bed in the morning . But it wasn't hard work, they were good to me, like a good dog, eh?

JEAN SCOTT:

I was married but had had left my husband. To be a quote "happily married woman" in a small town was the ultimate and your status was determined by your dependency on your husband. Nobody knew about my battering, nobody knew and I didn't go home and only a family that had befriended me knew about it.

You had to help yourself. I knew pretty well what had to be done around a house and so I did what I could for whatever the market would pay, which wasn't much. Drudgery, that's the best way I can describe it, hard work from waking up in the morning to dropping into the bed at night. You had to begin with breakfast and that meant getting the kettle boiling and that meant stirring up the fire, baking was quite a chore cause you had to have the right kind of temperature in an oven whereas you had to have a different kind of heat coming from the top of the stove to boil a stew. And dish water had to be heated. And if you had anyone to take care of, which you often did, in those days, because old people stayed at home, there were no rest homes and sick people didn't get to hospitals in small towns, so there was an awful lot of very heavy work from morning to night.

NARRATOR:

Urban and rural families worked during the hops and tobacco seasons in the Fraser Valley, earning cash to supplement either their meager relief or subsistence farming.

ALICE PERSON:

I don't know if you have ever seen hops or clusters of hops. They are very light, fluffy kind of thing, sort of like an acorn or a cone and in those days you pulled those big vines down and you look for all the beautiful clusters because there was more weight to them. My mother was out at seven o'clock. Some of the more littler ones didn't always get out here right away so she would leave them sleep. People with little tiny kids, you'd put them in the basket and you'd pick hops and talk to them or you would put them under a bush, under one of the vines or under the post. But you stayed right there.

They put the colored people on one end, Japanese people and they put the white people on the other end of the hops yard. But we had communicated enough that we would meet in the middle. And you were also segregated in the cabins that we lived in. And my mother and this Mrs. Phillips, we had convinced the crew that they better walk off--to try to get a higher price, a half a cent more or something--and here it ends up my mother and this Mrs. Phillips and each of their groups of kids with them and everyone else was picking hops!

NARRATOR: (rewrite)

The government sent young men to relief camps where they worked for a pittance in terrible conditions. Unemployed men organized the camps, marched in the streets, trekked to Ottawa, occupied the post office and eventually won social security. For women, the organization of isolated maids and agricultural workers was more difficult, nonetheless, they created a union for domestics in Vancouver, and from 1936-8 fought for a fifty-four hour work week, fifteen to thirty dollars a month pay, time off, accident compensation, health insurance and a hiring bureau.

JEAN SHEILS:

The Mothers' Council was a coalition of CCF, Communist, Women's Labour Leagues, pretty well all the progressive women in the city. The way that the police would approach and manhandle pickets and free speech there was a great fear of facism in this country. Women played a big part in the League against war and fascism.

EFFIE JONES:

A lot of the women were protesting through the Housewives' League, the times called for something more than social meetings then. We had branches all over Canada. We were desperate see, some of them were more desperate. They knew that they could help in some way

or other and came in. I think women were the most effective, cause they influenced their husbands, they had a lot of help from their husbands.

The powers that be were very afraid of the Housewives' League. They went after all of the leaders of the trade union movement, some of them were in jail back east, but I was surprised that they didn't get after me. It wouldn't have worried me, I was so worn out that I thought it would be a rest. I made no secret of it that I wasn't scared. That I had made all arrangements with my family if anything would happen if I was picked up.

They came to the meetings of our Housewives' League and would stand at the back in civilian clothes, like, but we got to know them and if I was chairing the meeting I always told the people that the police were at the back and that they were listening to all we said.

RUTH BULLOCK:

The workers were forced into thinking very seriously about politics because of the vast unemployment in the 1930s, the dreadful, dreadful misery, the awful business of the young men being forced into the work camps. Ultimately, they got 25 cents a day, but sometimes they were considered to be little more than social garbage and they were put into garbage dumps literally.

July 1933, after the Calgary conference on trade unionists, the CCF was formed. The very fact of the CCF having been formed was a tremendous boost for the rights of women. But, in terms of what we understand about women's rights in society today it was really quite primitive and women candidates were considered to be something of a drawback. You have to be twice as good as a man, which in some cases isn't too difficult you know.

JEAN SCOTT:

You can't live under a load of poverty without wondering why it is that way and what you can do to change it, I'm sure that's why I was interested in the CCF, it offered hope.

ALICE PERSON:

If you are organized you win, you know...alone you can't do anything.