

Mrs. Eva Vaselenek,
8670 - 168th Street,
Surrey, B. C.

547-5770

Interviewed: January 13, 1976

- Began work in 1943 at the Phoenix Cannery.
- Had to work because her little girl was sick.
- Began washing fish and then inspected fish as they went into the cans, they got 35¢ an hour.
- There was no union at the time.
- Next season she went to Gulf of Georgia plant to work on herring-- "that was a torture"--paid by "piece work".
- You didn't make much money because others would swipe the fish.
- From there she went to the Imperial Cannery.
- Worked at washing fish.
- You couldn't count on your hours--it depended on whether the fish were in or not.
- Sometimes you sat around all day and never got paid.
- Sometimes you got half hour or an hour's work.
- After the Union came in, things changed.
- Worked at Imperial Cannery for about one year filleting.
- Next season became a supervisor.
- Next year everybody wanted a Union.
- Describes the first organization of the union at the Imperial Cannery.
- Began holding meetings with management.
- The fishermen had amalgamated in 1943.
- Cannery workers became part of the UFAWU but negotiations remained separate.
- Comments on the reduction plant and net loft agreements.
- Advantages to Union---coffee breaks, better hours, over-time, stand-by time, safety features.
- When Japanese workers returned after the War they gradually fitted in.
- Story of signing up Japanese women into the Union.
- Discusses Indian women who chose to remain outside the Union--- they joined the Native Brotherhood.
- Finally she did sign the Indian women into the Union.
- She describes the company's reaction to her organizing attempts-- story of her confrontation with the company.

- Meetings eventually were held in the plant---talks of company "stool pigeon" who attended union meetings.
- She had to fight for every wage increase.
- Talks of fish strike 1951-52.(?)
- Safety features slowly improved---talks of dangers and the changes in safety features.
- Remained at the Imperial plant until 1968.
- Different species of fish described---"you had to know your fish"---salmon, sole, halibut, herring, tuna.
- She describes the changes in mechanization in the plant and dangers in the fresh fish part and the fish & chip line.
- Used to big difference between men's and women's wages but that has changed considerably.
- Describes early incident of discrimination against women.
- Describes the living condition at cannery workers.
- Houses were rented to the workers, social conditions dances, Christmas party, children's conditions--no day care center.
- Steveston is described as a "real bad place".
- Her children came to the cannery so she could keep an eye on them.
- Was laid-off at 65---her five children are all well educated now.
- Union, today is still fighting for better conditions e.g. sick benefits.
- Comments on union leadership as Communist.
- Story of being threatened by a hammer-wielding captain on a boat.
- Describes hectic union meetings and comments on her own ability at convening union meetings.
- Before Eva organized company kept union out by firing them.
- Went night and day---sometimes until 3:00 a.m. signing people up at reduction plant.
- Sites the example of her brother who organized the stone-masons in Vermont.

- Arthritis is a common disease of cannery workers---working in ice-cold water all the time.
- Company provides no compensation for this.
- Workers get two weeks off if member of the family dies.
- Comments on drinking problems and use of liquor licences during prohibition.