

**Stanley Grizzle:** Yeah.

**Leonard [O'Johnson]:** Well, the tourist car had a kitchen, um, the passengers could cook, and also, the porters could cook. And that was kind of fun because um, you know, people would have tea. That was kind of homey, because you know, you, your passengers would make a cup of tea, or the portered make a cup of tea and gives it to the passengers, and-and then they'd cook. It was kind of nice. You had an ice box, gas stove.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Leonard:** Yeah, that was pleasant.

**Stanley:** All right. Uh, there was no pension plan at the time, was there in the beginning?

**Leonard:** The only pension that you could get, I think it was--was that, uh, organization?

**Stanley:** The Porters' Mutual Benefit?

**Leonard:** Yeah. I think the pension-- I remember, um, my-my sister's husband, uh, what was his name?

**Stanley:** Brown?

**Leonard:** Brown. He retired and got \$25 a month, I think, or \$27. Yeah, you should ask, uh, Gary. He-he didn't get a pension. He knew what it was then.

**Stanley:** All right now, can you, uh, can we try to evaluate the union? Uh, well, first, what--what effect did it have on the total community and-and-and, uh--

**Leonard:** Oh, it uplifted-- It uplifted the community.

**Stanley:** [inaudible 00:01:43] A lot of the people or the Black community?

**Leonard:** The Black community.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh, right.

**Leonard:** Uh, [clears throat] in fact, uh, the-the-the porters got a better deal than the waiters. For some reason, maybe that was the company's way of dividing and then conquering. Uh, but, uh, they had to-- We would- we would go out with a- with a dining car crew, come back with a dining car crew, and they'd go out before we would go out. They would have almost a day, I think it was the day before we went out. So, we had a longer layover. And, uh, the-the pay of the waiter and the porter was just about the same. After the union, it- we-we-we advanced, but I don't think the waiters advanced as much as we did.

**Stanley:** Did the porters and their union have any status in-in the overall community?

**Leonard:** Oh, yes. Yeah.

**Stanley:** [inaudible 00:02:37]

**Leonard:** Oh, sure. Because at that time, uh, the only- the center, the whole center of the committee were-- the elite of the community, were the porters. Because even during Depression, it was the porters who were-were bringing home the food, you know? Uh, so they-they held a very important part in the community. They were not looked down on uh, you know?

**Stanley:** What percentage of the households, Black households do you- do you think we're fed by porters, uh, wages precisely?

**Leonard:** Oh, I think porters' wages fed about 90%. Because remember, there was- there was 320 porters, on the CPR, then there was another 300 on the CN.

**Stanley:** When you started?

**Leonard:** Yeah. And then there was a- there was the Pullman porters. So, there was- there was close to almost 1,000 men working, out of a population of possibly, probably 1940. 1940, the Black population was possibly around 50,000 or 60,000 I think.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. You think the Brotherhood played any-any role-- other than bread and butter issues, you think the brotherhood played any other role in-in the community?

[silence]

**Leonard:** Well, they-they, um, they, um, they had the sleeping-- Well, they-they attempted to have an organization called, The \$100 a Year Club, which Harry Gairey was the instigator. And they hope to- every porter to put \$100 in. It got men together, and since the-- Well, after the union people-- The-the men seem to get a feeling of-of, uh, of, um, of taking hold of their own destiny, so, they started, "Well, we put a hundred dollars a month, \$100 a year, and then, uh, buy property." But it failed on a kind of sectarianism, I guess. It failed mostly because the fra-fra-fraternity that-that, uh, took over while the union was-- While the union was being formed, the Masons were being formed. And it seemed as though the Masons, if nobody was a Mason, anybody wasn't a Mason, they wouldn't go along with-with what was going. And I blame the Masons for breaking up The \$100 a Year Club, because they weren't the instigators of it. So, uh, it-it-it-it ended up-- The first year, there was only four and a half men, and I say four and a half because one Porter had \$50. I had a \$100, um, [sighs] Grayson had \$100. There was only four of us who had \$100, and it just, uh, all the other big mouths didn't, uh, fulfill their-their promise. So it just broke up. But I insisted that the four and a half should stay and we could start from there, but it-it didn't, uh, it didn't-- Like a lot of things, you know, it didn't--

**Stanley:** Do you think the porters, uh, having a, probably the strongest economic base, a- the Black community helped to spawn or support, any other organizations in the community?

**Leonard:** Well, with money and uh-- With money, bringing money in the community, I guess. They had a home service. UNI Hall, I don't know if there was many porters. But yeah, there was porters who belonged to UNI, Marcus Garvey Hall. But they-they mostly-they mostly

went and did their own thing. You know, they- they-they-they-they-they had a kind of a half-assed elite-elite amongst themselves. But, you know, they patterned themselves after the society, and they-they formed an elite. And that was mostly the older men who had been on the road longer, consequently had more money, but that didn't mean that they did any more with-with their money. They-- Very few of them bought homes, most of them rented. But as far as business concerned, none of them went into business. I think-- Oh-oh, the one I'm forgetting now, I shouldn't say that. Uh-uh-uh, what was his name? He was always selling something, you remember he used to sell hair products.

**Stanley:** Bob Willis.

**Leonard:** Bob Willis was a very energetic guy as far as business concern. He always had something going. He always had something going. I think he instigated the-- He was one of the instigators, him and George Lynch and Harry Gairey, and Chevalier bought that property on-on the Augusta, yeah. And-and-

**Stanley:** Well, Freddie--

**Leonard:** -that was-- That-that was one of the things that they tried very hard to do, but--

**Stanley:** Freddie Blackman was involved there.

**Leonard:** Freddie Blackman. That's right, that's another instigator. But the problem was, I think, was because sometimes, if the men had worked in the factory, had seen each other every day, things would have worked out fine. But the fact that they were in and out and uh, you know, you'd have to wave at a guy on the-- He's going west, you're going east, and you'd probably holler out what meeting was all about. So, it-it-it slowed things. I remember I tried to go to school and-and it, uh, I couldn't do it because, uh, I could only get-- I'd missed two or three- sometimes, I'd miss three-three evenings, um, because I was out, so I-I couldn't do it. So, that's-- The railroad did deter any advancement because, uh, they didn't have any close association.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Leonard:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** You think the Brotherhood had any-any role in the struggle for civil- human rights [crosstalk]?

**Leonard:** Oh, yeah. Sure. It was always- it was always there up at Queen's Park, demanding-- Well, they-they broke down-- It was the porters union that helped break down the-the-the hiring of uh, the not hiring of Black conductors. It was Petgrave who went first and the union backed them up. And of course, along with, uh, with, uh, the Human Rights Commission. We had a Human Right Commission then, didn't we?

**Stanley:** No. No, commissions. It was the Labour Committee for Human Rights.

**Leonard:** Labour Committee for Human Rights, along with them, and then, uh-- [burping noise]

**Stanley:** All right, um, anything else to say on that?

**Leonard:** On what?

**Stanley:** On the- on the contribution of the Brotherhood to the total community?

**Leonard:** Well, the mere- the mere fact that they- that they had, uh, a Brotherhood, gave them a lot of respect, even on the railroad, you know? Because, um, we couldn't join the tradesman's union, that was a racist thing. It was- it was- it was a contradiction. Here was these-these union men, who wouldn't take in their brother porter because he was Black. That simply was it. There was racism in the unions, which was a contradiction, but out of every bad thing comes a good thing. At least, it gave us a chance to- to be together and get our own precedents, our own-- And in lots of ways, we spearheaded a lot of the struggles, uh, you know, spearheaded a lot of struggles, um, in the union, in-in other unions.

**Stanley:** For example.

**Leonard:** For example, the-the wages, the hours, you know? Uh, the business of sleeping. All right? The business of-of-of, uh, of when we-we were forced to sleep in an upper, and the union insisted that any space empty, if it's not being used, the porter should be able to sleep- use it. Do you remember that?

**Stanley:** Oh, yes.

**Leonard:** And then of course, the-the instigating of the- of the meals, where we-we insisted, well, I remember Randolph was the one that insisted that we pay, rather than get free meals. If you want to be f-- You have more freedom in paying for it, of choice, by paying for it. So, we decided to pay half. Half price.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Leonard:** In fact, we did pay half price before the union, and it just carries, it continued. Yeah.

**Stanley:** How would you like to evaluate the leadership given-given the union by-- Let's start with Randolph first?

**Leonard:** Well, Randolph, this is a- this is personal now. He was preoccupied with the fear of communism. And uh, that's-- I-I think he-- I-I-I was very disappointed the fact that he- that he would, uh, let that division come in, because, um, George Lynch, and I, my-my friend, George Lynch and I, were- we belonged to the communist party, and we didn't hide it. And, uh, in many cases, it was our affiliation with the communists that helped the union. For instance, the split. When they wanted to go into the NCR, which was a company union. It started out we--

**Stanley:** The National, NCCL.

**Leonard:** No, NCR. National Cash Register Union.

**Stanley:** Oh.

**Leonard:** Which was a company union. Sure. And uh-- Because I remember George Lynch and I went to the NCR at, uh, to find out what this union was.

**Stanley:** I thought it was the NCCL.

**Leonard:** No, no, no, no, no. NCR. We went to [unintelligible 00:12:06] and Dundas-- Well, Dundas West, well, I think the company was there. [unintelligible 00:12:11]

**Stanley:** That's where Knob Hill is now.

**Leonard:** Knob Hill now. And we went to see the union head to see what kind of union it was. And it was a-- it was a company union. So, uh, George Lynch and I went on our own, went out to Winnipeg, and tried to explain to-to-the-the people out there that, uh, Walker and and, uh, um, Travis, his name? Trotsky or not Trotsky?

**Stanley:** Phillips.

**Leonard:** Phillips, that it's a company union and-and, uh, and, uh-- Well, we- first, we went-- George Lynch and I went--

**Stanley:** Wasn't DG Clark of Montreal involved?

**Leonard:** Yeah, he was. Yeah, he-he--

**Stanley:** Well, you're talking about the National Council of Canadian Labour, NCCL. That's what you're talking about.

**Leonard:** Well, the NCCL was also, I guess they had a union at the NCR then.

**Stanley:** Yeah. Right, right, right, right, right.

**Leonard:** Okay. So, the NCR was a company union. So, I figured it was a- it was an inst- it was some kind of a trick because, uh, Phillips or somebody had met a man on the train.

**Stanley:** I know. I met him too. Yeah. I know what you mean.

**Leonard:** And this guy was trying to break the union. So, we-we went to the, the communist party and asked them, I said, "Listen, what do you do about this situation?" And at that time, you, I mean the-the president of Toronto used- was sending messages to-to Randolph and Randolph didn't answer. See? But when he heard there was two communists, [laughs] we went to Winnipeg, and-and almost got beat up by, uh, by the Walker brothers, trying to tell them, "Look at, you stay-- If you build a house, if it leaks, the roof leaks, you fix it. You don't run out and build another house." And so, we- when we came back, we had a meeting and, uh, we called a meeting because of, there was nobody speaking. Not even the president was-was talking to the issue. So, we called a meeting in-in Hudson's house. What's his name?

**Stanley:** Elijah Hudson.

**Leonard:** Elijah Hudson's house. And, um, the-the speaker was, uh, Leslie Morris from the Communist Party. And he told them, "Don't split the union. Don't quit it, 'cause it's your union" He said. Well, when Randolph heard, somebody sent a message and said that the meetings- the men are meeting communists, so, then he came. And he pointed Lynch and I out, he said, "Oh, yes. Sure, you had a split, 'cause that's the trick of the communist. They split you, then they heal you." You see? And at that time, we were-- we-we decided we would not answer him. We knew he was gonna accuse us, because, uh, it was cleverly done. When he came we had a supper up at Shirley House. The Shirley Jackson gave a supper and- and, uh, they invited George and I and, uh, it was a chance to-- I guess it was a chance for Randolph to check us out. And, uh, anyway at the meeting in the Carpenters' Hall with Randolph, he got up and accused us of splitting the union. And that was one of the-- So, from then on, we never got directly involved with the union, because it seemed like if we did anything, they'd say it was communist inspired, whether it was good or bad. So, we just took a side step. And then the men- the men were disappointed in us, because we didn't answer Randolph. But we decided that we didn't want to split the union anymore, because, uh, uh, because you have a confrontation with-with a leader like that, then there's you divide the union. So, we decided, well, we'll just take our licks and just back up. But, uh, that was a dangerous time for the union. It was the- it was a crossroads.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Leonard:** And I give myself and George Lynch the credit for saving it, because the-the time, I think, you were president and you did nothing about it.

**Stanley:** I didn't know. I didn't-I didn't know the communist [unintelligible 00:16:16] then.

**Leonard:** No, no. I'm saying, you did nothing about the splitting of the union. You did-- You stayed on the sidelines. You didn't say it was good or whether it was bad. It was-- Well-well, you hid your head in the sand, Stanley. I hope you leave that on the tape, [laughs] because you didn't do anything about it. It was finally, yeah, I think you did send letters to-- You know better than that, better than I do, whether you sent letters to Randolph and told them about the problems, but seems most people didn't think it was serious enough but--

**Stanley:** All right.

**Leonard:** Enough of that. What now.

**Stanley:** Interesting. You-you give me one of the best interviews I've had.

**Leonard:** Well, I'm one of the best men you know.

**Stanley:** All right. Um, Benny Smith what do you think of his leadership?

**Leonard:** Benny Smith was-was, uh, well I assess Benny Smith as a man that was the closest link to the men, Randolph, and the company. I mean, he could stand up in any-anywhere. And uh, no matter how difficult the subject was, he seemed to be able to bring it down to a level so everybody understood it. Randolph had a very high way of talking, and sometimes it was-- it was sometimes, maybe above ordinary men's head, because a lot of-- In the States, you know, a lot of men couldn't read and write. And so, Benny Smith was that link. And he

could also be a link to the-to the lower level and to the toppest level, because he had that-- He had that, uh, what do you call it? He had a way about him that everybody seemed to-- he-- Everybody seemed to know what he was talking about.

**Stanley:** [unintelligible 00:17:52]

**Leonard:** Well Blanchard was in the shadow of Randolph, of course. But, uh, I don't know. Sometimes, men have a vested interest in certain things, you know? And-- But he was uh, he was good. He was necessary, because he was a good representation. Yeah, turn it down. Turn it down. It was- it was- it was- it was good. It was good, because we-- you remember, I mean, I think that the porters being Black, were in a precarious position of not taking too much of a forefront. In other words, they had to creep. And he gave a good-- He gave us-- he represented us in appearance very well. 'Cause he was tall, good looking, and could speak well. Now, he-he had to answer to Randolph, of course. And then uh, some men felt that he wasn't representing us fully you know, because you remember that. That was the split was all about, was it? But no. The split was about we had no representation on the Chicago Board, right? So the split created-

**Stanley:** With the international Executive board.

**Leonard:** Yeah. But after the split, they felt that they should have somebody from Canada on the board. And that's-- One thing good that came out of the split was that they gave us a representation on the board. Now, whether that was token or not, I don't know. But it was a good, a very good move.

**Stanley:** All right. Um, what about the local leaders across the country, effectively that you could say across the country about the leadership of the brotherhood?

**Leonard:** Well, I don't know. I don't know. I-I never been to any meetings out. The only meetings I were in-- Well, you see, what happens with most of them-- See, the fact that they would belong to a fraternity, and they belonged to the Brotherhood, there was a conflict in there, because if you weren't a Mason and if you voted-- if you're not, if you-if you put a motion on the floor, and weren't a Mason, you didn't get it pushed. It didn't go through, no matter how good it was. And sometimes, they would isolate you because you weren't a Mason, you see? Now, George and I weren't Masons. On top of that, we were communists [laughs].

**Stanley:** Okay. Let's talk about who [unintelligible 00:20:01] the effective leadership as far as a-a-administrating and- and- and policing the collective agreement and so forth. And you don't know what--

**Leonard:** Well, personally, I never did-- Anytime I got in trouble, I wouldn't use the union. Because I never trusted them. I didn't trust them because of my communist affiliations, you understand? I figured it was a-- to go to them was just like going to the company, you know.

**Stanley:** They didn't have any good leadership, [inaudible 00:20:23]

**Leonard:** Well, you had good leaders. You had good leaders, but you had a conflict of interest there, because the leaders there was a Mason. You see? And, when you have--

**Stanley:** Who were the leaders there? Let's-let's-let's get to the point. Who were the leaders there? Who would you say were- kept the union together there? [crosstalk]

**Leonard:** I would say that Charlie Baldwin was a- was a- was the-the-the-the unifying force. Charlie Baldwin, Fontana, Chevalier, those men would stand down there around that clock and talk union. This man here would talk union, and-and-and-and these were the guys. But now, after they got a president, well, he didn't have a hell of a lot to do because they were still doing the work unofficially, you know. I remember Fontana would stay- come in from Vancouver and stand by that clock there and meet the men, coming and going. You know? So, that was it. It was a-- The-the leadership was-- Turn it off.

**Stanley:** The next question is, what did you think of the practice of tipping?

**Leonard:** I think it's the most demeaning thing in the world.

**Stanley:** Right, mm-hmm.

**Leonard:** You know, that-that's means that whoever has the money gets the most service. And, um, um, uh, as a rule, I don't- I don't-- I still don't believe in tipping. Although, I go out to restaurants and I tip, because I don't want nobody pissing in the soup You know? [laughs] Everyone notices a good tipper. But the-the tip-- the practice of tipping is very demeaning. It's part of- it's part of slavery. Post-nigger thing, you know, how we say?

**Stanley:** With the White porter- White porters on the railway-

**Leonard:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** -what-what did you think? Were they supportive of the union? In as much as [crosstalk]

**Leonard:** Oh, they-they-they were too racist to be supportive of the union. You know, like the few of them that were in it would always put the union down, mainly because it was Black. You know?

**Stanley:** Right, right.

**Leonard:** But how they got into the union was-was because they went to the government. White boys went to the government and demanded that they-- See, the government wouldn't hire White porters, because they say it's not a White man's job, it's a Black man's job. So, these young students went to the government and demanded the-the- to stop the discrimination against them, and they got on. They got on because they wanted to be a porter, because that's where the money was. They were making more money. The White-- The Black guys, the Black students working on the railroad could- would go back to school with \$2,000 or \$3,000, whereas the White guys would probably end up with \$900 working in town. So the tips-- so they-they-they demanded that they break down the barrier.

**Stanley:** Okay. Thanks very much. End of interview with Leonard O'Johnson.



**Stanley:** Interview of Helen Iola Heinz Wachter, W-A-C-H-T-E-R, at her home, Windsor Hills, California, on the 24th of uh, March, commencing approximately 06:34 PM. Helen, uh, you've uh-- You-you were born where?

**Helen:** Calgary, Alberta.

**Stanley:** Oh, yeah. I didn't know that. And when-when were you born in Calgary?

**Helen:** March the 6th, 1918.

**Stanley:** All right. And um, how long have you lived in Calgary?

**Helen:** We didn't live there very long before we moved to Winnipeg. I mean, to Edmonton.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Helen:** My mother and father went to Edmonton. My mother and father went to Edmonton.

**Stanley:** All right, I see. And how long you live there?

**Helen:** [smacks lips] Oh, it's been so long ago. About four or five years.

**Stanley:** All right. What was the- your father's occupation?

**Helen:** At that time my father was in Edmonton. He was a cook on the Canadian Pacific. It was an extragang, group laying track for the road up to Banff, Alberta.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh?

**Helen:** And my mother and father were the cooks.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see. What was your father's name?

**Helen:** Chrissy. Christopher Albert Heinz.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see. And your mother's name?

**Helen:** [unintelligible 00:24:45] Mabel-- Well, [unintelligible 00:24:48] Mabel Heinz.

**Stanley:** Her maiden name?

**Helen:** And then her maiden name was King.

**Stanley:** King. Oh, she was a King, yeah?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh?

**Helen:** From the Burton family.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh.

**Helen:** The Burtons and the Kings.

**Stanley:** Um, where was your father born?

**Helen:** Georgetown, Guyana.

**Stanley:** And your mother?

**Helen:** Burton, Alberta. Well, actually it was Edmonton, Alberta.

**Stanley:** I see, mm-hmm. Now, you, um, you gravitated to Winnipeg in time.

**Helen:** We did. My dad went to work on the railroad, but at that time, my mother and father were separated and-

**Stanley:** Oh.

**Helen:** -and my stepfather was on the railroad.

**Stanley:** Who was he?

**Helen:** Melvin Brown.

**Stanley:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah, sure. That's your stepfather?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see. Uh-huh. He was a sleeping car porter.

**Helen:** Yes, he was.

**Stanley:** As your father was?

**Helen:** Yes they both were. That was the only occupation in those days.

**Stanley:** That's right. What was the population of Winnipeg at that time? Any idea, the Black population?

**Helen:** I don't really remember. There was-- I imagine about 100 in those early days.

**Stanley:** And, um, you became a member of the Ladies' uh, Ladies' Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, didn't you? How did that come about?

**Helen:** Well, Brother Randolph came up to Winnipeg and organized the men, and the Auxiliary was formed, immediately afterwards. And my mother was the first Vice President of the Auxiliary, and I was the Secretary-Treasurer.

**Stanley:** Your mother's name was Mrs. Mabel Brown?

**Helen:** Yes, it was.

**Stanley:** Right. And, um, why did you join the Ladies' Auxiliary?

**Helen:** Well, actually my husband, my ex-husband, Joseph Richard Hudson Jr., was a railroad porter. And, he was elected, or I guess, appointed at- at that time, first Vice President of the Union of the Brotherhood.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Helen:** And naturally, all of us wives followed suit [giggles] into the Auxiliary. So, that was the real reason why I belonged.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Um, you don't know- you don't know what year that was you joined?

**Helen:** It was 1942.

**Stanley:** Was it '42? [inaudible 00:27:33]

**Helen:** The best of my recollection, it was.

**Stanley:** What purpose do you think uh, there was in-in having a Ladies' Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Helen:** Well, that was to keep them abreast of the activities of the men, to lend any assistance that they could in their endeavours, uh, particularly, socially. Um, I remember one time when my husband was appointed chairman of, um, an affair that the men were having for Brother Randolph, and he was sent out on the railroad for weeks, and all of these preparations had to be made, and so, I had to step right in and take care of the things that my husband would have done.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Helen:** That was one of the things that, um, prompted us ladies to help out wherever we could.

**Stanley:** I guess there was quite a bit of excitement about- that time, about the- about the organizing of the union.

**Helen:** Oh, indeed there was. You see, there was not much social activity, and all of us were scattered around the city. At least, the Auxiliary brought us together and we had something in common. Um, it was just a delightful organization. We enjoyed it. And we used to put on all kinds of activities and benefits, and uh, just trying to have a good time and do something worthwhile, not only for ourselves and our husbands, but for the community at large.

**Stanley:** So, give me the names of all the relatives that you had who were members of the Brotherhood and the Auxiliary.

**Helen:** [laughs] All my relatives who weren't farmers were railroad porters. Um, and actually, my husband, uh, Richard, um, my father, he was not a member of the union

though, neither was my stepfather. I don't know why they weren't. Let me see. And they- they were on the Canadian National.

**Stanley:** Oh.

**Helen:** Yes, they were in the CN. And I think this union was more or less for the-

**Stanley:** CPR.

**Helen:** -CPR.

**Stanley:** That's right.

**Helen:** Okay. And I can't recall many of my other relatives being on the Canadian Pacific. I didn't have that many relatives, actually.

**Stanley:** Teddy King was a [unintelligible 00:30:13] member?

**Helen:** Well, then he-- I didn't know he was a railroad porter. As far as I can remember, he went to war and he- as soon as he was old enough.

**Stanley:** He's your cousin, wasn't he?

**Helen:** Yes, he is.

**Stanley:** And his father, uh, was also a member of the union.

**Helen:** [smacks lips] No, I don't believe so.

**Stanley:** Oh yes, he was 'cause I have a picture.

**Helen:** My uncle Sam?

**Stanley:** Teddy's father.

**Helen:** Teddy's-- Oh, uncle John. Uncle John.

**Stanley:** First name--

**Helen:** Yeah, his name is John. My mother's baby brother.

**Stanley:** Yeah, he was a member 'cause I have a photograph of him.

**Helen:** Yes. Well, you see, it's almost a half a century ago.

**Stanley:** [laughs] Right.

**Helen:** And more.

**Stanley:** Do you recall what the working conditions were, which you brought about the need for union?

**Helen:** Oh, it was atrocious. Uh, the-- There was nothing else for the men to do except railroad. And the conditions under which they had to do it were so abominable.

**Stanley:** [unintelligible 00:31:08]

**Helen:** They go to work all hours of the night and day, and all kinds of weather. They go on long trips. It was hard to get home and hard to leave.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Helen:** They didn't like it. And they didn't like the atmosphere of servitude. I know my own father, he's a-- He didn't like polishing shoes, and somebody handing him, "Here, George," or "Here, boy." He didn't like that at all. My father was not, um, for the railroad at all. My father went into some other endeavours, which maybe were not as, um, lucrative, but he just didn't like that type of work. He didn't like their attitude. He liked it as long as it was a good, honest living, but he just--

**Stanley:** Whose attitude didn't he like?

**Helen:** Well, some of the superiors and the bosses, you know.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Helen:** I can't say that he was very happy working as a porter. Mr. Brown, my stepfather, he didn't work too long before he got sick and passed away.

**Stanley:** Oh. So, um, you would think-- would you say that the--the Brotherhood was respected by the community outside of the porters' families?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Helen:** It lent a little clout. I mean, they were organized and I think in the numbers, they had to be recognized as an integral part of the community.

**Stanley:** And what year do you leave Winnipeg?

**Helen:** 1948.

**Stanley:** You left Winnipeg in '48.

**Helen:** I did. That's why I say it's almost a century. 40 years, to be exact. I came to Los Angeles, July the 5-- July the 4th.

**Stanley:** Wow. All right. I don't have any more questions to ask, unless you wanna make a concluding comment. That would be--

**Helen:** Well, in conclusion, I'm quite flattered that you wrote this letter to me and asked for some assistance. I just regret that my things are so packed away that, in moving, I don't

have anything tangible that I could give you, even pictures right now. That's all that I would have because in 40 years, I would not have kept records. And the records that I did have, I turned over to my successor in the Auxiliary. I had to do that. Due cards and minutes and books, and things of that sort. Then when I came to Los Angeles, I did meet with the daughters, um, one- on one occasion and, um, they were all very cordial.

**Stanley:** Who, who did you meet with?

**Helen:** Well, there was an Auxiliary in existence at that time.

**Stanley:** Los Angeles?

**Helen:** Los Angeles. Yes. And, of course, um, since my ex-husband went into other fields of endeavour, in insurance and post office, and then ultimately, into the Department of Motor Vehicles, uh, he had no more connection with the railroad.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Helen:** And, of course, after our divorce, naturally, I had no more connection with the railroad or him or Auxiliary or anything.

**Stanley:** Do you think it's important to-to-to tell the story of the porters, of their union?

**Helen:** Oh, definitely.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Helen:** It could be a source of inspiration. They went through some hard times, and the union helped-helped in many ways to alleviate some of the difficulties. At least, that's my personal opinion.

**Stanley:** Well, that's the way I feel. That's why I'm going through this, uh, to record the history, because we've never had an all-Black union in Canada.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Stanley:** And which had, uh, was so well-well respected, you know?

**Helen:** Well, I think that's quite an honour too for the union, to have you do this project, and the number of places you have to go to secure your-your material. I hope other people have more to offer you than I have.

**Stanley:** It's not been easy. The people are giving the same story, they throw the material away, and so forth. So, anybody who has anything, if-if you find anything-

**Helen:** Oh, I'd be happy to pass it on.

**Stanley:** -you mail it to me, and I'll can assure you that I will, uh, send it back to you, you know?

**Helen:** It wouldn't be anything more than pictures, I'm sure. I used to keep programs, but we had several floods down here, and I lost my programs in floods.

**Stanley:** All right. I'll just give you my little address and uh-

**Helen:** Oh, thank you.

**Stanley:** -you decide, if you can spare anything. Thanks so much for the interview

**Helen:** Well, thank you.

**Stanley:** [crosstalk] of interview with, uh, Mrs. Wachter.

**Helen:** Wachter.

**[00:36:28] [END OF AUDIO]**