

Joy Correia

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Interviewer: Donna Coombs-Montrose

Camera: Don Bouzek

[Below are excerpts from a transcript of an interview conducted by the Alberta Labour History Institute. Read Joy Correia's full transcript in which she also speaks of her work in NASA, the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, its past victories and its ongoing struggles with management and the provincial government, including creeping privatization. The full transcript is available [here](#)]

JC: I'm actually an immigrant woman, which is not reflected, I don't think, in how I speak, because I obviously don't have an accent from the land of my birth. But I am an immigrant. I came to Canada when I was five years old in 1966. We left Kenya at that time because of the unrest that was growing there between the ruling British population and the indigenous people of that country. I am of Indian ancestry, so my family had been in East Africa for decades. My parents were born in East Africa. My grandparents, at least three out of four grandparents were born in East Africa as well. As a family, we had been in East Africa and in India back and forth across the Indian Ocean for many, many decades. Because of the political situation, my dad decided to emigrate. He came first in 1965. He landed in Montreal and he was working there. My parents are both teachers. Then my mom and my sister and I followed the following summer.

Q: You all lived in Montreal?

JC: We all lived in Montreal for a short time, for a few months. This is very interesting for me, because my Dad just passed away in January; so, as a result of doing Dad's eulogy, we discovered a lot of information from talking to family and friends, going through papers and photographs and documents. That's why I can speak with a bit more confidence about what brought us to Alberta. My Dad had a very good friend, a childhood friend, who was working at the Blood Reserve school in Southern Alberta; that's eight miles north of Cardston, Alberta. He was somebody that was part of our community in East Africa, had emigrated prior. He said to my dad, "If you're interested, I know I can help you get employment with the federal

government as teachers to work at that school, a residential school.” So my parents took up that opportunity and we all moved to the Blood Reserve. I remember coming out on the train and then there was a breakdown with the train and then we were on a bus for some time. Those are my recollections of traveling across Canada from Montreal to Calgary and then to the Blood Reserve. So that’s how we came to Alberta. My parents worked at that school for... so my parents worked for three years at that school. My sister and I attended that school. We lived on the reserve, just what would be the equivalent of about half a block or so from the residence and then from the school. We were there for three years.

Q: Was it called Blood Reserve?

JC: Yeah, at that time it was known as the Blood Reserve. The school was called St. Mary’s School.

Q: So you went to a Catholic school on a reserve?

JC: Yea, on a reserve. We stayed there for three years. Then my dad – parents – decided to look for other opportunities. We ended up moving to Tabor, which is a small community at that time of about 6,000. It was there that I spent the rest of my primary and secondary education, in Tabor, which was a rural farming community.

Q: When was this?

JC: That was in 1969 that we moved to Tabor.

[....]

Q: What brought you to Edmonton?

JC: School. I came to Edmonton to go to University of Alberta, to go into sciences and graduate from University of Alberta. Then I got employment with University of Alberta, totally by happenstance. I had a student friend who just happened to tell me about... I believe his name was Simon Fuller, who was quite a well-known geneticist. That was the degree I had, and I was actually pursuing computing science qualifications and TA-ing in one of the undergraduate labs. Sabina Creshe was her name. She said, "Hey Joy, there's this talk, Simon Fuller." We went. As we were sitting there waiting for him to come, she said, "Oh, and by the way, Department of Genetics is looking for a tech, a staff member that's already got their degree, because they have a vacancy in the lab." That was to prepare materials for student labs. So I applied, I got the job, even though I apparently wasn't the preferred candidate by the professor for that lab course. He actually wanted his technician to get the job, but she hadn't completed her degree yet; she was still at least a year out. So according to the department administration, I was the preferred candidate, and that's how I started. In two heartbeats I met one of the most influential union activist women in my life, Effie Woloshyn. At that time, I think I was just over 22 years old when I started with the University of Alberta as a staff member. Totally naïve about unions, even though, get this, my parents as teachers, one in the provincial service and one in federal service, were in two of the most powerful unions in this province – the ATA, the Alberta Teachers Association for my dad, and my mom was part of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Neither of them had any solid connection with their union. As I reflect on it, neither of them, when they had issues with their employer, reached out to their unions for representation. I just shake my head at that now as I realize how they struggled through those issues.

Q: Did it have to do with their status as immigrants?

JC: Absolutely, because I don't think they were unionized back in Kenya. That wasn't how things were done. I did actually talk to my dad, because he had a couple of unfortunate things that happened during his employment. I remember the second one, because I think at that time

I had been working already for a short time. I said, “Dad, why don’t you go to the ATA and ask for help?” “Oh no, I’ll just deal with it on my own.”

[....]

Q: Sometimes immigrants doubt that there’s equality in the services.

JC: There’s also that reverence – or maybe coming from a Commonwealth country and colonial kind of thinking – that it was around the acceptance of authority more. I don’t know. That would’ve been my mom more so than my dad. My dad was a rebel against whoever he felt didn’t live up to his standards, his principles. He would’ve have had an issue. My mom would’ve dealt with it very much differently.

Q: Where were you living when you were working at U of A?

JC: First I was living in a house in North Garneau, university housing, because I was a student just before getting that job. I managed to maintain that residency for another five months, and then I ended up moving into an apartment; I think it’s called Garneau Towers [....]; it’s just in behind Newton Place, whatever that building is, and I was there for a while. Then in 1984, with my mom’s help, I bought a home in the Mayfield neighbourhood on the west end of the city. I’ve been there ever since.

Q: You’re not in Jasper Place anymore?

JC: Never was in Jasper Place.

Q: Your address is very close to there.

JC: Yes, very close. I know that Jasper Place was a community of its own at home. Effie lived in Glenora – her dad had built that home – so she was telling me a little bit about that community. In fact, her dad came over to help my husband replace some tile in our bathroom, so he was telling Kerry about that neighbourhood, Mayfield, and how when he first moved to Edmonton that was all swamp. It was infill land and I think there was an airport there, the famous Wop May, for whom Mayfield is named. He was a pilot, I think a bush pilot, who flew up to the north quite a bit. So that's the community that we lived in.

Q: Is that within the boundary of what's called Jasper Place?

JC: Yes.

Q: Do you currently know it as Jasper Place, or still as Mayfield?

JC: No, we always called it Mayfield; I don't think I ever understood it as being part of Jasper Place. But now that you say that, that makes perfect sense to me that it would be considered part of Jasper Place. I always just call it the old West End, and I include all that area kind of west of 149th Street. But it strikes me that you should talk to my friend Shawn Peterson, who is a retired teacher out of Jasper Place High School, who grew up at about 93rd or 92nd Avenue and 150th or 151st Street, so he was a Jasper Place resident. He actually retired from teaching at JP School. He's a Social Studies teacher, so history he would know very well. I'll talk to him first. I'm sure he would love to chat. Anyway, so we were talking about the neighbourhood. Isn't it just funny enough? One of my dad's colleagues, a fellow teacher, actually did his degree at University of Alberta at the time when Mayfield was being built. Mayfield's claim to fame, I came to learn from Mr. Shozak, is that Mayfield was the first ever developer-built neighbourhood in Edmonton. It was just kind of odd that Carl was here at U of A doing his Education degree, I believe. So when he found out where we were living, he shared that information with me. I thought it was just kind of a small world that brings you back into that same circle.

Q: How long have you been at your current residence?

JC: Since 1984, so almost 40 years, 38 years.

Q: And you've raised a family in this neighbourhood?

JC: Yes. My boys were born at that house; well, born at the Misericordia and brought back to that house.

Q: Did they attend school in that neighbourhood?

JC: They attended Holy Cross School, that was a K to 9 school. It was just in Canora, just kind of a kitty-corner neighbourhood just a little bit south and east. That was a French immersion school, and I wanted them to have another language.

Q: How has the neighbourhood developed over the 40 years you've been here?

JC: It's changed quite a bit, the neighbourhood has. When I first came, most of my neighbours had been there many years, the original purchasers of those homes. A lot of them have passed on now.

Q: What kind of neighbours did you have then?

JC: The neighbourhood was also very monotone, not a lot of diversity – lots of Eastern European families, I would say. There were a couple of Ukrainian families down the block from me. Mike, behind me, he was Polish, and she was of British extraction. Ralph was a war veteran and his wife was Dutch; he'd met her in Europe on the Second World War. Lots were people that had bought those homes when they were first built. That was in the beginning when we

first came there. Lovely people. Very good sense of neighbourhood, which I loved about the neighbourhood. I think because we had that sound wall that goes around Mayfield Road on the west and north of us, there's only three or four entrances into the neighbourhood, so it really gave it... and I think it's smaller too in land area, so the number of homes was smaller. You really had a sense of community, like a small town. It also had quite a vibrant Community League, so there's always things that were going on. Of course, there are two schools there, primary schools, from both Edmonton School Board and Edmonton Catholic School Board. They're just a stone's throw away.

Q: Did you meet with any discrimination from any of your neighbours?

JC: My mom had a really interesting conversation with my neighbour. He was talking about... they're Dutch and part of the Christian Reform Church. At that time the school was just being built or expanded in – not High Park – but the next neighbourhood over, which I can't remember the name of right now. Anyway, his children were there and he was a little distressed because, as the school was expanding, they were having children from outside their community attending, lots of different races of children attending. He was quite worried because his eldest daughter might connect with somebody from outside their race. So he was having this conversation with my mom. For context for people that don't know, my husband is a WASP, of Scottish and English ancestry. But he was very worried for his daughter because, you know, mixed marriages, they don't always work. That's what he was saying to mom. I thought, "Okay Sid, you're obviously not paying attention to who you're talking to."

Q: Did you have any direct experiences with discrimination?

JC: No. I think I've always had sort of these kind of around me conversations. I remember once a friend of mine that lived by Southgate and I used to go visit her quite regularly, and someone made a comment about the fact that I was this Indian coming to visit her. She just kind of looked at them I guess and said, "Oh, I never really realized that about you." I think it's because

I grew up here. I'm so well assimilated, if that's the word. Over the phone, you're not going to know that I'm an immigrant woman. Probably my mannerisms, my world view, really isn't very different from the norm, or at least not a first glance.

Q: Did you have any neighbours who were Indigenous?

JC: Absolutely there were some families in the neighbourhood. My sons played hockey. The older one played hockey longer, so he had a couple of young Native brothers that were a part of his hockey team. Because I was part of the Community League, I met some of the other families. In fact, the fellow that was the financial officer for Enoch Nation, his family – I think he was estranged from his wife – so his ex-wife and children lived in Mayfield across from the Community League. Those kids all played hockey.

Q: Were there different nationalities within your community?

JC: Over the years it was very welcoming. Nobody I don't think ever...

Q: When you first moved there in '84?

JC: I don't know about 1984, Donna because, until my kids were born and involved in community activities, I wasn't involved with the community much. Later on in the later '80s and early '90s was the height of my involvement. There were some Chinese families, a couple maybe, not a ton. The community over time has become more and more diverse. I think several years ago, maybe five or ten, you would notice a couple black persons walking down the street to get the bus or whatever. That was a bit unusual because I don't remember that, in the first few decades of living there, we ever saw a Black person in the neighbourhood. Behind us now where Ralph and Ruth used to live, there's a Filipino family there. Around the corner there's... I don't know her actual nationality, but she's somebody that comes to volunteer. My husband is

never at the casinos because she volunteers there regularly – Connie is her name. But we see her walking, and she's from some East Asian country, but I couldn't tell you which one.

Q: Are you still active in your community?

JC: No, not really. Kerry does, he goes to volunteer at the casinos.

Q: Have you seen evolution in your community?

JC: Evolution in what way?

Q: Some people regard the area as a place where newcomers stay for a while before they move on.

JC: I will tell you that I think in our neighbourhood, when people buy there, they tend to stay a very long time. At the end of my block there's an Indian family there. They've been in that home at least 20 years, since the mid to late '90s.

Q: And your other neighbours?

JC: The other neighbours have basically either died from their homes or they've gotten sick and had to leave their homes and find other kinds of housing. It's pretty stable. I wouldn't say it's a high transient population, I think because it's mostly single-family dwellings. There's four or five apartment buildings but they're just three-storey walk-ups, so they're not huge. Then there was a little bit of a townhouse development across the street from the Community League. But those were rentals at one time, straight rentals, and now they've turned; some years ago they put them up for sale. What I see is people have pride of place and people take ownership. Even the apartment buildings, most of them have turned into condominiums, so those apartments are for sale as opposed to simply rental.

Q: Was there any significant industry in the neighbourhood? Did any of your neighbours actually work in the neighbourhood?

JC: Our neighbourhood I would say is a high percentage of civil servants, whether it's provincial or federal – lots of teachers and nurses and those kinds of helping professions there. Then there's a huge proportion of small businesspeople. My neighbour across the street, he works in H-vac systems. My next-door neighbour, he and his brother run a landscaping company, and that kind of thing. We've got quite a few... across the street is a hairdresser and his family. So there's lots, not necessarily all run out of the neighbourhood, though some of them have started in the neighbourhood and then they've moved out. Like my neighbour across the street for sure, his H-vac business basically started out of his garage and now he's got a relatively large company in comparison to that.

Q: Would you say that the income level in your neighbourhood is moving up?

JC: I think it's pretty middle class. There was a couple of homes that have been renovated beyond what I'd say is the neighbourhood style, but for the most part it's been pretty simple.

Q: Do you intend to continue living there?

JC: Yes, for as long as it's still suitable. Those homes were not huge and the investment wasn't great to buy into that neighbourhood over the years. I would say it's at average or lower than average prices for Edmonton. It's so convenient. It's 15 minutes to downtown, it's five or ten minutes from West Edmonton Mall, ten minutes from Westmount Mall. When Meadowlark used to be something other than a medical centre, that was also another five minutes. What's now Mayfield Common, again all those kinds of things are pretty close at hand. So it was pretty convenient. And you didn't have the same cost of living in Glenora, and the little bit more land you'd get if you were on the other side of Groat Road, for example.

Q: Do you no longer see indigenous families taking a stroll in the neighbourhood? Has it transitioned into other nationalities?

JC: I don't think I ever saw indigenous families taking a stroll, Donna. Frankly, I wouldn't even hazard a guess whether people are Indigenous or not, because I have no kind of sense, unless somebody's almost overtly Indigenous. I remember when I was going to school on the Blood Reserve, one of my classmates, who's an Indigenous person, had red hair. That's not common. There's such a diversity of how people look, and you can't always know just by looking at people where they're from. Some people, yeah, it's easier to tell. I think there's still a number of immigrant families that moved to the community because the price point is decent, the houses are 1,000 square feet, and there's a little bit of a yard. It's not a huge investment to buy something that's fairly reasonable in terms of space if you're trying to get on your feet. And we have had people that have been there for five to ten years and then moved on to bigger homes or other neighbourhoods. But they're not that common – say, between six or eight houses on either side of me and across the street that I know of. Most of those people have come to stay. So it's been really lovely, because you never know who's going to move in, because you have no control over who's buying next to you. . . .

I was going to say, now that I think about it, I think the house at the end of our alley, I don't know if it was owned by what's now Indigenous Affairs, and it was used to house Indigenous families. So we've seen a little bit of turnover in terms of who was living there. Not people that I've ever met that I know of in the neighbourhood. I just notice it because it's where I turn to access the alley into my garage. But I don't know if it's still owned by the department or not.

Q: Did they have a housing program in the neighbourhood?

JC: I have really no idea, I have really no idea.

Q: It could have been because of the proximity to the Camsell Hospital, that it might have been a place for families to stay.

JC: I don't think so, because it seems to me people lived there for multiple years. But I don't know that they lived there multiple decades, for example.

Q: So you saw a transition?

JC: I feel like I have. I'm thinking about how well the yard was maintained or not maintained, depending on who was living there, and things of that nature, sometimes the cars that were out front and that kind of thing. I just never really paid attention. We were very confined to our little short stretch of homes on either side of us and across the street because we formed such a tight community. If I would walk by there or drive by there I did notice, but not really otherwise.

Q: Like in my neighbourhood, you just know the people around you.

JC: Yes, in your short, close-proximity kind of thing. Or other people that you met through the Community League activities or whatever. I think Mayfield is only 800 families or so. I knew more of them when I was more active in the Community League, because I was the registrar for the sports, so I got to meet a lot more people. But not so much now that I'm quite distant from it.

[.....]

[END]