

Transcript of

From lunchroom to boardroom: records of oral history project, Women in the Labor movement, 1930-1970 interview with Joyce Murphy and Ivy Willey, Ipswich, Queensland, 20 Nov 1991

Transcript by Sue Pechey.

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LUNCHROOM TO BOARDROOM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE MURPHY AND IVY WILLEY

INTERVIEWED BY THERESE COLLIE.

20 NOVEMBER 1991

Collie: This is reel 1, the date is 20 November 1991. It's From Lunchroom to Boardroom Oral History Project about Women in the Labor Movement for the TLC. This afternoon I'm interviewing Joyce Murphy at her home at 16 Trumper St Ipswich with her friend Ivy Willey.

C: Ivy and Joyce can you tell me how did the Ipswich and West Moreton Women's Auxiliary of the Qld Coal Employee's Union start?

Murphy: It was in April the 15th 1958 and we started because of a stay down strike we had and all the women and wives helped there and we thought we would have an auxiliary and we thought if there was anymore stay down strikes then we would go back to the auxiliary for help. So that's how we started, we put a levy on the miners, a three-pence a week, which was a six-pence a fortnight and they helped us with that. We also got twenty five dollars off the Qld pound, twenty-five pound off the Qld Coal Employees Union to start off our auxiliary.

C: What happens in a stay down strike? Can you tell me what that means?

M: Well we had different people going out at different times, we went out in the morning my husband and I and with helpers and started off breakfast and then another lot would come for lunch, but we would make breakfast which was cereal and mostly stewed stuff or meat or things like that. We would give them a meal for the morning and then we would finish and the lunch one would start.

C: Why did you become involved in the Women's Auxiliary Joyce?

M: Well I spose mostly because my husband was in the union and automatically went out with him mostly, I didn't have very much to do with coal miners before and but I did when I married him and that is why I went into it.

C: What did he do? What was he's position?

M: He was a check inspector to start off with. He used to, they used go around and check safety of the mines and there was two employed by the union each time.

C: So then he went on to be the president of the Q.C.E.U.? When was that?

M: Oh lord, well he was., I don't know, I don't know sorry.

C: That's O.K.

M: He was in about twenty years as president wasn't he Ivy?

Willey: Oh yes.

M: Yes

C: Why did you become involved in the Women's Auxiliary Ivy?

W: My sister, my older sister was already in it and my husband was working at Moreton Extended Colliery at the time and they were having problems and I joined the Women's Auxiliary to see if I could help to keep his job.

C: What mines were operating at that time?

W: There were twenty-five in Ipswich and fifteen in Rosewood, I can't name all of them. There was Caledonian at Rosewood, there was Oakley at Rosewood, there was Lonefield Collieries that's some of them in Rosewood. At Ipswich there was Box Flat, there was Rhonda Colliery, there was Moreton extended, there was Haigmore Collieries, there was Aberdere, which was quite a few tunnels, plus others just off my head, I just can't remember anymore.

C: When did you become involved Ivy?

W: 1959

C: And you Joyce what year was that?

M: Well it was when it first started, 1958.

C: Where were you born Joyce? Can you tell us about that?

M: In Ipswich, in Booval in Ipswich. Yes we were all born, my husband was born in Collinsville, but I was born in Ipswich, all the, I was going to say the five generations of Murphy's have been here.

C: And how old are you now Joyce?

M: Seventy

C: And what sort of schooling did you have?

M: I went to primary school but I left at fourteen after the scholarship years, I didn't go to high school.

C: And what work did you do when you left school?

M: Well actually I didn't work

C: Why is that?

M: My father thought that girl's should stop home and not go to work, which was a very bad idea. I would never let my child stop home, I suggested they go to work, which they wanted to anyway.

C: And how did World War 2 affect your working life?

M: Well I helped with the Red Cross in shops they had there and also had a place where they had recruitment's and people like that and we went and helped with the paperwork there, with the office work there.

C: So before that work you were at home doing work around the home. Did you enjoy the experience of working outside the home?

M: Oh much better than home all the time.

C: Why was that?

M: Well you saw more people and you had a broader outlook on things, it got very narrow at home, wasn't a good idea at all.

C: Were your parents unionists?

M: No, No not at all

C: What were there politics?

M: Well my father was Labor, I guess, he wasn't very enthusiastic Labor though. Yes, he was Labor.

C: And when you became involved with Digger and Union activities through the Women's Auxiliary was there any opposition from your family?

M: No, not really because my mother and father had died anyway, but my brother's and sisters, no there wasn't any opposition.

C: Where were you born Ivy?

W: North Ipswich and still living there a sixty-seven years of age.

C: What sort of schooling did you have?

W: I come from a family second youngest of nine and I was the only one to receive a secondary education and I did my junior at St. Mary's Convent in Ipswich and from there I went for six months in the State High School in Brisbane and did a commercial course and started work at a motor bike firm called Morgan and Wacker and my maiden name was Morgan and I was the only Morgan in the company. I worked there for eighteen months and then in 1942 I started work as a clerk at the Ipswich Hospitals board and I was there until 1948.

C: Were you influenced by anyone in your politics?

W: Not by my family because they were Tories, even my uncle's and aunts and I really had no politics in me at all until I went to the Ipswich Hospital and my boss, the secretary, was Evan Marchinson who later became the Labor MLA for Wilston.

C: You talked about your family being Tories, but being very poor Tories.

W: That's right we were very poor Tories.

C: You told me a story about how your father caught for the Mayor of Ipswich.

W: As children, Mr Stephenson was the Mayor of Ipswich, cause he was a real Tory, and my father caught eels in the Bremer River which was very clean at the time and us children had to hold the iron tub on the floor while he poured the boiling water onto the eel to skin it so he could take it up to Mr Stephenson, the Mayor.

C: What did you think about that?

W: At the time I was too young, I just accepted it.

C: But now

W: And now, I would give the Mayor of Ipswich and eel because he's a Labor member.

C: Just going back to your work with the Women's Auxiliary, what sort of work did you do when there weren't stay-down strikes? What was the day to day work with the auxiliary? What sort of things did you do? Joyce, you've got one the books that you kept as Treasurer of the auxiliary, maybe if you read out some entries you can give us an idea of the ordinary work that you did?

M: Well we had a thing called "Hoy" or "Wogs", we took money through that, we also had a tennis where we got funds but we had a colliette? dancing class for the young members, auxiliary's children, children of the auxiliary, also the older one's and that was a dancing class and which April the 18th, about 19 the what? We took three pound one and six from it and our social committee 'wogs' morning tea was two pound two shillings. Our membership fee was two-shilling to join, which we paid once a year, two shillings to join the auxiliary. Also dancing classes and that's about all.

W: There was also the auxiliary, along with many members of the Queensland Colliery Employees Union formed there own Black Diamonds Comedy Company. From which we receive finance. It was quite surprising the talent of some of the members including Digger Murphy, Tommy Miller, the little short red-haired Scotsman they gave many a laugh at the National Theatre at Booval where the union used to be situated, and it used to be crowded the nights they gave their performances.

M: Also Ronny Murphy he was in it too, he was one to the check inspectors of the union. That was in 1959 I read out before that we got the money for the Hoy and the Wogs and the Colliette's.

C: Can you remember one of those parties Ivy?

W: Yes I can remember one very well. We used to provide luncheons, the ladies, and we would leave our handbags in the kitchen and one day I went in and one of my friends said to me "Ivy is that your

handbag?" and I said "Yes" and she said "well that women there getting a drink of water just came out of it", and I had asked her if she had taken out of the bag and she said no and when I checked it, I knew how much money I should have had cause I wasn't rich at the time and I found out that there were so many two shilling pieces missing and when we asked her if she had it she said no and she went to walk out of the kitchen and out of the leg of her bloomers fell the twenty-two shilling pieces and everybody asked are you going to use them and I said my oath, I'll put them under the hot water tap and put them back in my purse.

C: You collected some money for the striking miners in England, in 1984, the Auxiliary collected that money or was it the coal miners?

W: We did give a donation out of our funds but there was a levy put on all miners throughout Qld and it was handed in to the auxiliary and we handed over the total check at the trades and labor hall in Brisbane to two gentlemen who came out here at the time.

C: Ivy, in the sixties as the president of the auxiliary, you went with a deputation to see the minister for the mines, Ernie Evans. Can you tell me what you remember of that event?

W: If my memory is correct I think it was at the time when they were talking about opening up central Qld and we were worried about our men's position in the mines down here and we visited Mr Evans, who was a very healthy looking man about six foot four and about twenty stone and he invited dear Ellis Shelty who was eighty seven years of age at the present moment into his room and he asked us if we had ever been down a coal mine and we said 'yes' which we had and we asked him and he said no and I don't intend to go.

C: What did you think about that?

W: Well we thought fancy a man like him being in the position he is, he wouldn't know what safety regulations or conditions the men work under.

C: Do you want to tell us another?

M: Well also with the...., every year we used to give bursary, twenty pound..., dollars.

C: Is it after 1966?

M: 1969, bursary winners we used to give twenty dollars to a boy and a girl to help them with their education and also we had an art competition every year and gave prizes for that, an art competition.

C: You judged the art?

M: We had judges belonging to the men and the QCEA and the auxiliary, that judged them.

C: What sort of categories were there? Can you remember?

M: Mostly age, you know a certain age, something for one age and then went on from then on.

C: Did it have to have something to do with coal mining or..

M: No, no I don't think so. The twenty dollars bursary we would acquire from the education department and it would be which ever coal miner child in the Ipswich area was the highest in the exam, that's how it..

W: Had to be a child a coal miner.

C: That's good. Some of the more terrible disasters happened were the explosion at box flat in 1972, which killed twelve men. Can you describe Ivy what happened when that explosion occurred? What did the Women's Auxiliary do?

W: Well I think we were out there within an hour of the explosion and we had a stall keeper in Nth Ipswich and we would just ring him and it was early in the morning and we would go out and we went out and we were beaten by the Salvation Army with their water urns and they were a very good lot of people of course to get on with and we provided tucker and come ten o'clock they knew there was nothing more that could be done cause we were very sad, we knew a lot of the men down there and it was a terrible thing for children, grown children to come up and ask you if dad was out yet and you had to tell them no and it was very sad when they had all the clerics from all the different religions and they had a service and it was a...and we all went home very sad on the day.

C: Would you say that was your worst experience of your work with the auxiliary?

W: Yes and I'm glad we never had to do it again.

C: What did the Women's Auxiliary do to help the miner's family after that disaster and other disaster's?

M: Well we paid out..if on a death we paid out to the wife fifty dollars to help buy food if they had any in the house, to buy clothes, but from then on they got compensation, but we gave them that. Also we paid so much per week to a relief fund, if they were eligible for a relief fund if they were off sick, through sickness or as long as it wasn't compensation we paid them three pound a week for a wife and a husband and so much for each child, for relief fund.

C: What was the worst experience of your work with the auxiliary Joyce?

M: Well, once there was a man, caught down below, he got caught down below with a fall of coal and they were trying to get him out and put down air tunnels, vents for where they thought he was and eventually they got to him, I don't know whether this is the worst thing that could of happened, I think it was the happiest really, and when they found him, he called out and one of the miners said 'oh he's alive' and when my husband was talking to him in hospital later on, he'd lost his arm through the coal being on it and the circulation and he said he never ever thought that the miners had given him away, he thought all the time that they would get me out eventually and I think that was a happy time. He's still alive today and that's about twenty year's ago. Wouldn't it be? A long time ago anyway, yes.

C: Joyce you were involved in the Women's Auxiliary during the fifties, during the anti-miner, anti-Communist propaganda. How did that affect you and your husband Digger?

M: Well it did with being communist member but it didn't affect the auxiliary any at all, but it did himself, they, we had to get rid of all our papers in the house and also we had, what do you call it? Doubles, yes we were doing those and we had to do those on the quiet because it was illegal to do it and we had to keep a look out for people, for police if they'd come around. That was for funds, we sold them to the miners and the members.

C: What are doubles?

M: Double's are races, if you put down two horses and if you paid so much for one of those tickets you had those two horses and they one, you got the amount of money which was the first prize that day, but it was a very bad time for our family and the friends that we had in the communist party.

C: In what way?

M: Oh well it was so frightening because of things they were going to do was at the country and everything else beside and it was.. it didn't affect the auxiliary, they had nothing to do with it.

C: There weren't people who weren't allowed to be involved in the auxiliary because of it's connections to the coal miners?

M: There was a lot of talk about the people in the party which was included, I was included, but then again I was never ever a communist member, but my husband all the rest of them copped the slack of it all, but otherwise no.

C: Sorry?

M: Over and done with thank goodness now.

C: Good.

Collie: This is reel 2 on the 20 November 1991. This is the From Lunchroom to Boardroom Oral History Project about women in the labor movement and the TLC and I'm talking to Ivy Willey and Joyce Murphy at Joyce's home at 16 Trumper St. Ipswich.

C: Now Ivy, I just asked Joyce about the effects of anti communist propaganda of the fifties on her, did you experience any affects on you as a member of the Coal Miners Union Women's Auxiliary?

W: Well I joined the auxiliary for better conditions for my husband as a miner and other men and I didn't care what people thought, even though I was branded a communist I knew what I was myself. A few years later, my photo along with Joyce and Marion Alison we were receiving a donation from Box Flat Colliery and the paper traveled to Darwin where my son resides and when some of his friends saw it they said 'is your mother a member of a communist party', they must of thought to be a women, to be attached to an auxiliary you had to be a communist and I am one who can prove you didn't have to be.

C: Right. I think you said that some women weren't allowed by their husbands to join the women's auxiliary. How did you feel about men who didn't want women involved in union business, even in an auxiliary capacity? Were all the men opposed to the women's auxiliary?

W: No not all of them, but there was those who were. They didn't want their wives involved in anything to do with auxiliary even. But we had a lot of good workers and we didn't want those who didn't want to be there because we were there because we wanted to be there.

C: Did any opposition from the men affect your work?

W: No because we took no notice of them. We did our own job and we did it very well, which goes to prove because we have been going now for thirty-three years.

C: Joyce your husband 'Digger' was often away in his capacity of president of the QCEU. How did you cope with three children on your own?

M: With difficulty at times. But no you go used to it, because they got used to being without their father, in fact they wondered who the stranger was that came home every now and then, but you manage and he was only away a week here and a week there, sometimes it was bad, he was longer but, I don't know, you just went on, forgotten about it really.

C: Did he appreciate it the difficulty that you had on your own?

M: I spose in his own way he did, but he never ever said so. Yes he did, he realised this. I was away, I had an operation once and I just saw the notice reading it this morning and it said that I had been in the Common Cause, that I had been second that how he appreciated all the people coming around while he was away, he was away down at a national convention, and how he appreciated people going to visit me while I was in hospital, oh yes he did.

C: What's the common cause?

M: The common cause is a paper that the miners bought out, it is national it comes from Sydney originally. It used to be weekly, but now they have it monthly in a book form, it was a paper before but now they have it monthly. News of everything that is going on all over, down in Sydney and here and up north, up in Qld.

C: Did the women's auxiliary ever write in the Common Cause?

M: We always used to send down a notice of what we were doing, of our activities, but not at lately, not at all the last few years.

C: Did you say it was a national magazine?

M: yes

C: So there are other women's auxiliaries throughout Australia?

M: Oh yes. There a lot down south, in Sydney way, in Newcastle. They've got one here at Blackwater and that would be all.

W: I don't know if they still have them, but they had one at Wollongong, cause a lot of those people used to come down from Wollongong for those national conventions we used to go down to.

C: Did you go down there in the capacity of president of the auxiliary?

W: Yes I did, I accompanied Joyce once, and one day I went on a day flyer to Sydney for the day, they were trying to arrange another national convention.

C: And that's why you went down for the day?

W: That's correct and the money for that was supplied by the federation.

C: And how did you feel about that?

W: I felt very honored at the time that women had chosen me to go and they were a great lot of working women in Sydney at the time, but I suppose most of them have passed on, but they were a great lot of workers for the movement.

C: And was it a good way to keep in contact and find out what other women's auxiliaries were doing?

W: Yes it was and we had it one year when the federation had their meeting and we were all down there at the same time and we were invited to functions that they had and they treated us very well. I can remember going on a deputation to Sydney to the American Embassy, and I think at the time, don't ask me what the year I just cannot remember, but I think it was about nuclear ships coming into Australia before they even came here.

C: The work you did in the Ipswich and West Moreton Women's Auxiliary is traditionally seen as women's work, the cooking and the fundraising. Is that how you saw it?

W: Oh no, no, no we did lots of things for the men, we protested as wives of these men who were going to lose their jobs and today the reason there's not the number of members in the auxiliary is because the miners of today are reaping what our men fought for.

C: What do you mean by that?

W: I can remember my husband at one stage his mine was out for fourteen weeks trying to keep the mine open. They were going to close the mines in the Ipswich district and they thought being a smaller mine, they could keep them not working and that's what they did, but there's not the miners in Ipswich today and I'm afraid where we had bread and dripping, they have bread and caviar today, for what we fought for with our husbands.

C: Why aren't there the mines here today? A lot of the mines have closed, what's happened?

M: Well we've lost the orders that we had, they don't need coal now, they don't need coal for driving trains and they don't need coal for all the things that they used to have.

W: A great number of them have had to pull up their homes and children and they are working central Queensland mines.

M: There is only two or three working in Ipswich at the moment.

C: Is that why there isn't the same involvement in the women's auxiliary today?

W: Well I know one of our members, Gray-Anne? Powell, her husband is now up in, he is well in his fifties, he has gone to central Qld so he can get his entitlements, when he turns sixty years of age.

C: So the family has split up?

W: Yes.

C: What about the auxiliaries connection with the UAW Joyce? The Union of Australian Women? Were you involved in that organisation and their struggles for rights for women?

M: Well we sent a delegate down every meeting that they had which was once a fortnight and they represented us and brought back their views and what was told. Yes we helped as much as we could with UAW and we gave donations very often which they wanted mostly and but yes we did help otherwise but not a lot, only with the delegates and things that went on there. We went there to the meeting and fundraising.

C: What do you think you achieved in the women's auxiliary?

W: Well I learnt that the working class you can find lot of loyal people, loyal even you get on in years as we are.

C: Was there a lot of unity between the women in the auxiliary?

W: Oh yes, yes at all times.

C: What other achievement did you make Joyce? How would of things have been if there hadn't been a women's auxiliary?

M: Well every year we had been given, going back twenty-six or twenty-seven years ago, we started giving the retired mine workers a luncheon, cause we were all a bit youthful in those days and we would do all the catering to a three course luncheon and here we are on the 25th February 1992 and we are giving them another luncheon. A reunion we call it, and last reunion we had a hundred and thirty and I hurried up, and made a date for this one because all the old miners say 'Ivy, when's the next luncheon'? And it is one day that they get together and really enjoy themselves.

C: So did either of you ever want to be a miner yourself?

M: Never I went down the mines with meals at times, we had to go down and help, and it was such a relief to get back up again, I would never ever go down a mine voluntarily.

C: Ivy?

W: No not really, not when you went down once and saw what was down there, that was never my ambition.

C: What about doing different sort of work than what you did? You both spent a lot of your life not only working for the auxiliary, but working for families and in the home. Did you ever wish that you had work outside the home?

W: Well I reared five children and it wasn't until my youngest was eleven years of age that I went back to work as a cleaner and when I worked for Walton's in Ipswich and the boss always used to get me to help with stocktaking and he told me that I was wasting my time cleaning and eventually ended up a clerk for Walton's in Ipswich and I'pilly. I ended up retiring in 1979 after four years, being at I'pilly as a purchases clerk and even at my age learnt computers, which I was grateful for, for thinking I wasn't too old for that.

C: So you think you would have liked to have started that earlier?

W: No, I had five children and they all grew up good children and I never had any bother with them and I think it was me being in the home with them. No, I never wanted to work when they were growing up.

C: What about you Joyce?

M: No, no I was too lazy. No I had a lot of voluntary work where I would go around with Meals on Wheels and help in other things. I've never ever wanted to go out to work.

C: So what sort of activities are you involved in today? Meals on Wheels still?

M: Meals on Wheels and Bingo. I visit hospitals through the Meals on Wheels, which we used to do to by the way when we were in our auxiliary and no I don't do very much else.

C: And Ivy?

W: Well I have one friend who has lost their eye sight, she's a very independent person, that's why she's a friend of mine, two of a kind, but I like to take her down home made baking once a week and I have another friend who's getting on and I bake for her. So instead of going out helping organisations I just do those to little things and that's all I'm capable of at the present moment.

C: What about your trips with the retired mine workers and their wives? You go on trips with them?

M: Yes, every three weeks it is organised by the Retired Mine Workers Assoc. and our fare is to take the price of the bus. Most trips cover sixty one passengers but as the years gone on there decreasing and last Monday week we had a trip to Kingaroy and cause you all know who's country we were in up there at the time. We went past Bethany and here were all these retired mine workers who had had bad times with Joe, were all singing out Hello Joe and Flo and I thought that was very hilarious.

C: Did you get any pumpkin scones?

M: No Flo didn't have enough money after Joe's court costs.

C: Well how far do you think women have come in their struggles for equal rights? What do you think about women's situation in society today? Do you think attitudes have changed? And how have changed?

M: They must have changed, mustin' they, over a period of times. They do a lot more than my day now. My daughter's attitude to life, she's in lots of UAW and things like that.

C: She's president of the UAW?

M: Yes, and also she's the national, International women's day, she's in those kind of things. Oh yes its changed a lot to what it was.

C: What do you think of your daughter Cheryl's work?

M: I think she's wonderful. She's got two children to look after and also she's got schools and things she has to do. Oh yes she's a very active member. More so than I ever was.

C: You don't think she is stretching herself too thin?

M: Well I hope not. I sometimes think so, to do everything but I hope she isn't. She thinks she can manage it so....

C: Do you think there is more pressure on women to be able to encompass career and home and different organisations?

M: There are so few women that want to do these kinds of things, isn't it. It only ends up with those special few doing everything if they want to keep the organisation going, which worked out the same with us. It was only four or five of us member of the auxiliary that did any good and there is only four or five left now and two of us are the old ones. A lot of people are working themselves, and they just aren't able to do work for the women's movements.

C: Why do you think it was only left to four or five people?

M: Mostly I suppose because they weren't interested enough, they were working and doing other things and you get a lot of criticism always with the one's that are doing all the work, they are always to blame for everything and this why the other one's get out they think they can sit back and say that so and so's fault that this is happening and half the time they are not at the meetings to give their vote and criticise what's been done. You know very often that happened when we were active. Like always, women say this away from the meeting and not at it and we used to try and make them come and give their views, but they never ever did.

W: Well I never thought I would see the day when we'd have two women labor premiers of their state, that's a feather in the cap for us and I think we'll see more, I hope I do anyhow, my ambition in life is to live to the year 2000 and I'm sure within the next nine years we can see women going further than what they are.

C: And looking back what influence has your work with the women's auxiliary had on you as a person do you think? How has it affected you life, if you hadn't had the women's auxiliary work to do?

M: I don't know I suppose its made us realise what other organisations that have to do with women had to put up with which we wouldn't of known if we hadn't of belonged to the auxiliary.

C: What do you have to put up with?

M: Oh well, a lot of criticism mostly isn't it among people for what they do, but it makes you realise that if there was a lot more in it they could of helped a lot more than what they did. Are now they are as

what Ivy said, there's a lot of women coming forward and doing the things, but they didn't in the olden days.

C: What about you Ivy? What influence has your work with the women's auxiliary had you as a person?

W: That's a hard one Theresa. Well I've made many friends. It made me a person to think for myself, which I have done and if I am wrong I'll admit it, but if I'm right I like to be appreciated, which I think I am as far as the auxiliary goes.