

Interview: Mike Dumler [MD]

Interviewer: Keith Reynolds [KR], Ken Novakowski [KN]

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Transcription: Blossom Cheng and Donna Sacuta

KR: My name's Keith Reynolds. I'm working with the Labour Heritage Centre and I'm here today with Ken Novakowski and Bailey Garden. And we're here to interview Mike Dumler who has had a long career in the labour movement, and particularly talk to him about his time as president of CUPE. But before we do that, we're going to talk to him about how he got there and where he went afterwards. So, we'll start off by asking Mike, can you tell us about where you were born and your early years.

MD: [00:00:45] I was born in San Diego. Which is not exactly a hotbed of trade unionism, in 1947.

MD: [00:00:53] My dad was a baseball pitcher, pitched for the San Diego Padres in the San Diego Baseball Hall of Fame. But he and my mom split when I was about five or six and so I never got to see him play, but I have seen video old footage and stuff. Graduated from San Diego High School in '66, was attending Mesa College and living on my own, I'd grown up in a single parent family.

MD: [00:01:33] And by the time I was I think in my final year of high school I was living on my own working at Sears and attending Mesa College playing basketball I played basketball in high school and played fastball at Mesa college and then got my draft notice and I was a credit, a credit and a half shy of getting a deferment and in order to pick up the credit I would had to drop shifts at work which would mean I wouldn't be able afford to live. So, in fact I ended up serving in the U.S. forces, went to Vietnam, and survived came back went to Europe and it was in Europe that I met Canadians. I took a European discharge and worked for the Canadian Forces for a couple years then was returning to North America to attend the University of Oregon when friends said I should fly from London to Montreal and work my way across Canada visiting all these friends who I met while in Europe and I did and then didn't leave.

MD: [00:02:53] I sort of fell in love not only with the people and the country but I also met a woman from Saskatchewan and ended up settling in Nanaimo having three kids and ended up working for the City of Nanaimo which made me a CUPE member and I thought agreeing to edit the union newsletter because I was doing a newsletter for the rec department, was a safe position within the union. But it did lead to me becoming the full time President of CUPE 401 and that led to becoming the president of CUPE BC and a Vice President the Federation of Labour the national Vice President representing BC and Alberta on the national executive board and I think I was on the provincial council at the NDP at the same time and the executive of the New Westminster District Labour Council. In one year, I had five elections.

MD: [00:04:08] I think that was '88 which is probably why in '89 I ran for the national Secretary Treasurer's position in CUPE. Unsuccessfully, but ended up moving my votes to Sister Darcy who eventually became our national President and is now in MLA in New West.

KR: [00:04:31] I think we're going to want to go back and revisit a whole bunch of stuff that you just raised but I'll start by asking you were either of your parents involved in politics or unions in any way?

MD: [00:04:43] I didn't really know my dad that well I knew him probably more from Aunt Polly and other members of his side of the family.

MD: [00:04:57] But my mother had worked for a Macdonald-Douglas. For a brief time, I think probably two years.

MD: [00:05:04] So I did attend a union picnic when I was probably 9 or 10 with no - but there was no connection. I didn't understand what unions were.

MD: [00:05:15] I mean I was a kid and it was a picnic and fun. My mom, you know with the with the defence contracts and stuff I think that what happened was MacDonald-Douglas lost the contract to my mom eventually went on to do other things and so that would be the only union connection. I don't ever remember any of the kids I was growing up with talking about their parents being in union or anything and if anything, [00:05:54] My first real union experience was in Nanaimo.

KR: [00:05:59] You were part of that generation of young Americans for whom the Vietnam War was an important part of their life. Could you perhaps talk a bit about that experience and how it shaped the way that you thought about things?

MD: [00:06:12] Well when I got the draft notice, I used I my first thought was well. I want to finish my education. But if they're going to get me anyway so I might. I was close to my grandfather and then went and had a chat with him and he said of course we'll support you whatever you decide but it makes sense.

MD: [00:06:38] If you can get the government to pay for your education that you're struggling to pay for and now we're struggling to help you with. If you do your military service. And I can remember him saying there's no guarantee you'll end up in Vietnam, war may be over. I mean that was the thinking back. This was 1967. You know that was the thinking back then. So yeah: a) that you might not go, b) it's going to be over soon. I did my basic training in Fort Ord California. One of the advantages of going in and signing up is you could get some choices whereas if you wait until they came and dragged you, you could get sent to Augusta, Georgia which is where I actually ended up for my advanced communications training. And from there I had a choice of going into the officer's candidate school, staying and being in and they asked me if I was interested in staying being an instructor and I said No, I'll just take my chances. And within a week I had my orders sending me to Vietnam. During my year there I worked in several phases of communication. We went from Private to Sergeant, radio relay team chief, patch panel control, NCO.

MD: [00:08:12] And so when I came back from Vietnam, I was expecting you know to serve out a year somewhere civilized.

MD: [00:08:24] And they sent me to Fort Huachuca Arizona which is near Bisbee Arizona, well Bisbee is the closest town and it's got, back then it had a population about 500. This was in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the desert. And so, I signed up for two additional

years in order to go to Germany. I figured it was the only way I was ever going to see Europe and I would have done just about anything to get out of that place. So I took the next two years went to Europe and worked for, was assigned to strat comms strategic communications command took courses in troposcopic scatter communication, real good background training for becoming a union officer. And you know when it came... Oh I was playing basketball for the brigade and the person who ran the civilian programs for the Army kids left suddenly, they had no replacement. They asked me if I would do it because my background with the San Diego Parks and Rec department and so for my last year in in the army, I wore civilian clothes and essentially ran recreation programs for kids. That's how I connected to Canadians. We organized a sort of alternate Fourth of July, First of July events where we brought the kids together from the two Canadian bases at Lahr and Baden and two American bases in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart and that through that I met the Canadians and ended up being offered a job as I was getting my European discharge running youth programs at the Canadian Forces Base in Lahr.

KR: Going all the way back to San Diego and then Germany recreation seems to have played a really important part of your life as it continues to do until today. Could you talk (audio missing) of your life?

MD: [00:10:36] Yeah. Growing up in a single parent family in Southern California back in the 60s. There wasn't money for tennis lessons or golf lessons or any of the things that I've been able to provide my kids. But there was a good recreation department and they offered programs that were free.

MD: [00:11:05] I don't know if they still, I doubt they still do. But back then particularly for inner city kids we could go to the rec department learn how to play table tennis which is one of my passions now. I played in a basketball league when I was 9 or 10 which eventually gave me some skills enough to play for the high school and play at the junior college level, and then at the command level in the armed forces. So yeah. And there were role models. The staff at the recreation department in my view were almost as much counsellors as they were recreators, and it was sort of that which stuck with me and that was my job in, when I got to Nanaimo that's where I worked for a number of years till the passion for the labour movement took me in another direction.

KR: [00:12:10] You've talked to us a bit about how you came to Canada and arrived in Nanaimo. Could you talk to us a little bit about the work you did for Nanaimo and how that led to your getting involved with the union.

MD: [00:12:23] Well I, among my early friends in Nanaimo was David Littlejohn who founded the Boys and Girls Club there and we connected and so I was doing some stuff with that, my friends Doug and Noreen who I stayed with for the first while in Nanaimo were both teachers and they got me on the substitute call list. And then there was some dispute where the NDTA, the Nanaimo District Teacher Association actually had a picket line out at the board, school board offices and that's where I met my then future wife on the picket line. Still wasn't a member of a union, still didn't know a lot about unions but my friends had talked about the issue and just my sense of social justice made me say well I'm going with you as a supporter. And that was sort of the first connection. While I was substitute teaching, I was also helping out at the Boys and Girls Club similarly situated in parks and rec department, a recreation coordinator quit, the community and youth recreation coordinator quit with no notice and left

and they had programs you know they run groups of programs with start dates, end dates and stuff. They had programs to start like within days. And I got a call or actually Doug got the call and said Mike they want to talk to you at the recreation department. And then that led to me being hired and then being threatened to be deported after a year because you only get the permit for a year. MD: And Tommy Douglas was the MP at the time. And David from the Boys and Girls Club knew him and asked him if he could help me and I ended up meeting with Tommy and his staff actually helped me get my landed immigrant status.

KR: And from there you ended up getting involved with CUPE Local 401.

MD: Yeah, because that's as a recreation department employee you were a member of the city local union. And I think it was about 18 months after I had started to work and still really didn't - other than signing the card and because that's how I was told that's what I had to do I did no thought that I you know I didn't understand what it meant to sign a union card at that point. But in 1976 there was a big strike lockout. And you know I did my picket duty became a picket captain and then painted houses for a friend who was a painting contractor when I wasn't doing picket duty or captaining a picket line. And that was that was my real introduction to the union. The solidarity, the sense that for any justice in the workplace you had to work together to achieve something and that was all sort of a new experience for me.

KR: [00:15:51] Well you very quickly ended up on the local executive. How did that come about and what sort of work did you do with them?

MD: [00:15:58] Initially I didn't think I was on the executive I just agreed to edit a newsletter. Somehow, they manage to make that into an executive position, and I was sort of okay with that. And I was helping a steward sort of look after the recreation department because it didn't have its own steward and I was asked if I would help him. So, I thought that was the safe thing to do. Eventually became the steward for the rec department and the president of the local was a fellow named Coghill and he got cancer and the vice president everybody just expected that Lyle Percival who was the vice president would move up. Well Lyle's wife threatened to divorce him. They were in the middle of building a house. She just put such incredible pressure on Lyle that he started then canvassing everybody to find someone else who would step up because it was full time presidency and the local at the time had a number of separate bargaining units stretching from Ladysmith to the Vancouver Island Regional Library which had branches in Bella Coola so, it was a pretty major commitment to be president of the local. They had units in Parksville, Qualicum that the president would go and help bargain the contracts for. So, it was it was far, I hadn't realized just how demanding it was, of course Lyle in getting me to agree didn't paint the whole picture. And I thought I could do it for like a year or two and then just disappear. Well, the labour movement once it gets you rarely lets you go.

KR: [00:17:59] And from there. When did you start getting involved with CUPE BC and the Vancouver Island District Council?

MD: [00:18:07] That was funny I got involved in the local labour council as president you're automatically the delegate or one of the delegates in the Labour council. I was also automatically the delegate to the Vancouver Island CUPE Council and it was through that that I met Thelma Roberts who was an activist out of the Cowichan area and she was the regional vice president on the executive board of CUPE BC and there was a vacant position as

alternate and she said to me she hadn't missed a meeting in years and you know but we should fill that position Mike and you can do that it's not you know it's not... you may attend one meeting in the next five years. Well as it turned out she finished off that term and then her family circumstances changed or something and I was told I had to step up. It wasn't like there was even a choice. You know you just you get told okay you're going to be the next regional vice president. That's how I ended up on the CUPE BC executive board.

KR: [00:19:34] Jumping ahead a few years when you were president of Local 401 that was part of the time during Operation Solidarity. Can you tell us about your experience with Operation Solidarity?

MD: I actually became president just after Operation Solidarity. And at the time I was so angry at... I almost didn't. One of the problems Lyle had in convincing me was I felt betrayed. I was part of a group that was all set. We had signs, we were prepared to go, we were supposed to go on a Monday. I think we got told on Friday. No, that it's off there's been a deal cut and stuff. And of course, nobody had a copy of the deal we didn't know there were rumours going around that Munro had sold us out, that Owen sold us out. Owen Dykstra was president of CUPE BC at the time. I called Owen and he said he couldn't tell me the details, that they would be released. You know whatever in 24 hours or something and that we had to stand down and I went to the president of our local, Joe Coghill and he said stand down. We have to stand down and I just thought that was wrong.

KR: [00:21:05] So that was my Operation Solidarity experience and probably part of the reason that I ran (audio missing) CUPE BC was the angst, disillusionment, frustration that came out of that.

KR: [00:21:21] Can I ask a supplementary, in respect to Solidarity during your time were there any rallies or protests leading up to the strike that happened provincially?

MD: Oh yeah.

KR: In Nanaimo, there was an organization in Nanaimo?

MD: [00:21:34] Yes.

KR: Can you talk about that for a bit?

MD: The teachers, the civic workers, PPWC which wasn't even part of the house of labour it was outside of the Labour Congress. All the major unions in Nanaimo had sort of come together. Believed that the restraint program was just a nasty attack on workers. We used to PPWC Hall, they opened their hall up and let us use it as a staging centre. And we had rallies not only in Nanaimo but Ladysmith which has an even longer trade union history. Ladysmith less so but as we went up to Qualicum and Parksville which were retirement communities which had less of a labour tradition but certainly up Island, Cumberland you know all the places with either a significant union membership and/or a strong labour history where we're active in in staging stuff.

KR: [00:22:49] So you went from being a discontented member Local 401 in a very short time you were President of CUPE BC. Could you tell us about that transition and the campaign involved?

MD: Well, I was less disillusioned with Local 401 and our members and I mean if anything it was sort of inspiring. As terrible as the deal was and the way in which it was accomplished, it was also inspiring in seeing people come together with common cause, common purpose, setting aside differences because there were differences between PPWC for example and you know I mean they had raided another union in Nanaimo.

MD: [00:23:41] But here we are together doing battle in common cause. That's inspiring and that more than disillusionment with some disillusionment, it was with some specific leaders and the process that those leaders followed which was not a traditional labour movement process. The labour movement if you're going to sign a collective agreement you take it to the members, you get it ratified. You prepare them for it, you if you're going to make proposals those are run by the members. You have a mandate. I felt at the time there was no mandate for what they agreed to, they wouldn't even tell us what it was and yet still expected us to immediately halt a movement.

KR: [00:24:37] But again you went on from there to being president of CUPE BC How did that happen. What was the campaign involved?

MD: [00:24:47] A group of friends who were active in the Vancouver Island District Council of CUPE decided that the president at the time she had been part of the Owen Dykstra camp and part of the Kelowna Accord needed to be removed and replaced and persuaded me to run for that position. You know it's a very part time you know. It's a leadership position but the council meets once every couple months. And it wouldn't be that time consuming. Little did I know when I agreed to run for that, well I didn't know that she wasn't up for election that year. They had two-year terms alternating terms for different positions. So Maxine was safe for a year but...

KR: What position was Maxine?

MD: She was president of the Island Council of CUPE.

KR: OK.

MD: So, I had a campaign, a team, everything. We're meeting on a Thursday or Friday night and somebody drops the bombshell that she's not up for election. They're looking through the bylaws and stuff and saying she's not up for election. But Owen is. And that was where then I had to go and talk to my spouse at the time and talk to some of the local executive because I didn't want to leave the local in the lurch. And they all decided, the Local decided I should run for president of CUPE BC. My spouse did. The committee did. It was really a simple decision at that point.

KR: [00:26:43] But you are obviously well known on Vancouver Island. But it's a big province. There's the Lower Mainland. There's the north. There's the interior. Where did you get the kind of support that you would have needed to be president of CUPE BC.

MD: The year preceding that election Bernice Kirk who ended up supporting a different candidate for president called me because the person she had lined up to chair the Resolutions Committee had backed out at the last minute. And me being a full-time president wouldn't need to get a leave of absence or something. And so the convention before the convention where I campaigned and was elected, I was the chair of the Resolutions Committee we had a large number of resolutions we had some contentious ones as we usually do. And I played a role in sort of mediating between the submitters of resolutions and the Executive Board and the Resolutions Committee itself and sort of trying to find consensus and compromise and so I gained a bit of a profile through that. The Island Council supported me I think about three to one. The amazing thing was the Fraser Valley CUPE Council supported me unanimously. I don't think it's ever and it ever done that before and Maxine Zubrin, no Maxine Kramer was the Chair or President of the Fraser Valley Council. Her husband Mike Kramer was a very influential rep in CUPE. Maxine came out in full support of me and she whipped that Council and got a unanimous endorsement. So at that point I was endorsed by the Island and the Valley. The Lower Mainland split and Diane Jolly was running for vice president and sort of out of the action caucus, the further left-wing group within CUPE BC and although we didn't create a slate, we talked to each other we had similar positions on the major issues. We reflected that in our literature. Dennis McGann, no it was Mark Belanger from CUPE National who actually helped us do some colour coordinating and stuff so we could send the signals that we're running together without paying the price of any baggage each other had adversely affecting the other. Marlene Crozier who was president at CUPE 606 and a very influential member on not only on the Island but well-known across CUPE BC. She was my campaign manager chairperson and she worked tirelessly on that election and every subsequent election She's now retired in Campbell River and still a close personal friend. So that's sort of how I...

KR: [00:30:28] Can you just tell us a bit about the convention itself where you got elected?

MD: [00:30:30] It was in Victoria which was an advantage obviously for me. My opponent John Kirk was from Kelowna. He's no relation to Bernice Kirk but any baggage that Bernice had sort of spilled over to John and he and I became very close friends and colleagues and worked together for many years afterwards and he far sooner than a lot of his supporters came on board with me when I became president and helped to heal the campaign wounds. So, we're in Victoria. I'm being told that you're still a few more votes behind every day of the convention. We've got this fantastic campaign committee working the convention and they're taking me to delegates that they know were undecided and avoiding taking me to delegates who either already decided for me or decided for the other side. There's a good statistician keeping track of how many ticks I've supporters that they've identified for me. And now there's the night before the election we're going around hanging door knockers on the doors of our members because this is on the Island in the labour movement on the Island is tight. While it's a unionized hotel and you know we got information of who is in what rooms and we had our undecided list and so we started there and then we did all our supporters and then we actually had time I think was about 2:00 in the morning when we hung the last door knocker on a non supporter's door because there's always some chance they may be influenced enough to flip. We know that there were at least a couple of guests in the hotel who weren't there for the convention and got door hangers but we were pretty good we were pretty accurate.

KR: You were CUPE's first full time president, weren't you?

MD: The year I was selected it was still a part time position. We had a major lockout in the interior over privatization and contracting out of CUPE jobs, lasted over six months, it nearly bankrupt CUPE BC. Fortunately, the members adopted a special resolution assessment. CUPE 500 Manitoba extended a loan to us on the strength of a phone call and the relationship I have with Ed Blackman who was the president of that division at the time and CUPE national ended up loaning us a few hundred thousand dollars. The IWA the BCTF, a number of unions stepped up loaned us money so that we could continue the strike pay because in addition to the lockout Kelowna we had a strike in Powell River over the exact same issue at the same time. So, although I was part time president I was probably working more than full time most of that year. At the next convention decision was to take a resolution to the members to have a full-time president. It was defeated by one vote in a two thirds majority and in fact they kept recalculating because it wasn't even a full vote. We were shy point Something-something-something. Then there was an attempt to make it a temporary full-time position because that would only require a 50 percent vote and I threatened to resign if they did that. The membership had spoken we would put a resolution to them. We can just continue what we've been doing for a year because we have an election every year that we shouldn't try and manipulate the members. We should just respect this and move on. And the following year we created the full-time presidency with us. I don't believe there was a single vote against it. I think it was unanimous. We also passed a per capita formula, a percent per capita which was something that Bernice and I felt very strongly needed to be done that we needed to be fair in our tax system. If we're going to criticize the provincial and federal government tax systems and what's really fair to workers is a percentage dues structure and that structure still in place today that we put in. I'm quite proud of that.

KR: [00:35:49] You didn't have the quietest experience that any CUPE BC president has ever had. In 1987 there was a one-day general strike and you and other people ended up being charged with civil seditious conspiracy. How do how did that come about and what was the result.

MD: [00:36:10] I was Ottawa the National Executive Board meeting when someone said Mike come look at the monitor and there's a picture of myself and I think John Shields then somebody else and the headline "Labour leaders charged with seditious conspiracy". I immediately called back to Nanaimo and assure my wife and kids that I'm not going to jail, and if I do it's ok. You can just bring my kit bag. The union will look after everything. You know the mortgage will be paid and then by the time I got back to Nanaimo a lawyer I forget which lawyer it was may have been John Baigent. There was probably a cast of lawyers representing us and the courts not only threw out...it was Brian Smith Attorney General at the time?

KR: He was Attorney General.

MD: Yeah. The courts not only threw out the case they awarded the costs so that the government had to pay the union's cost for litigating it.

KR: [00:37:33] Could you tell us more about CUPE's role in that one-day general strike.

MD: [00:37:40] The officers of the Federation were trying to figure out how we could best mobilize members and lay the groundwork for the overturn of some of the worst labour

legislation in the history of the province. We knew a provincial election was coming up. For the average member the rules in the in the labour code and stuff aren't relevant to their normal day to day lives. But to the lifeblood of the Union having legislation that's fair when you want to organize, that doesn't give employers the right to interfere in a member's selection to form a union or not. Those are critical and as leaders of the labour movement we were concerned that there wasn't a general recognition of just how bad the labour code was. You know the media sort of treats our criticism of it offhandedly. Some of us said it should be more than a one-day general strike but the consensus point at which all the unions were prepared to make a commitment was the one-day general strike and it was probably the most successful one-day general strike certainly that I have ever experienced or know of, that out of that one-day general strike we had non-union workers walking off the jobs supporting us. We had community groups that didn't have a history or a tradition of supporting us coming out in support of us. When Mike Harcourt formed the next government, he had a clear mandate to fix these wrongs in the labour code and did in fact many of the labour leaders today would give anything to have the Harcourt labour code back. Today's labour code is just terrible.

KR: [00:39:48] Could you talk a little bit about how the labour movement came to that consensus and who was involved.

MD: [00:39:56] Well there were a number of labour lawyers Leo McGrady, Patrick Dickey, Rogers I mean almost every sort of senior labour lawyer was telling the officers this is terrible. It's one of the, it's the worst labour code and we boycotted or attempted the boycott. But when you come to, you can't organize, well you can try and get a voluntary recognition. But the climate back then was so bad and employers had their own government essentially putting in roadblocks to workers unionizing. And I think there was enough consensus among the labour lawyers that they presented a very persuasive position to the labour movement that something had to be done. And some unions had been badly hurt early on in those new changes to the Code, the construction unions in particular. There were changes that made it not only harder for them to organize but also to defend a unionized work worksite, so that none...they were forced to allow non-union workers onto work sites that in the history of as far back as I can remember it did not been allowed and in fact other unions had supported them with pickets, mystery pickets and stuff to defend the sanctity of the union work sites.

KR: [00:41:45] The decision that brought this about though was it done around the BC Fed table or how did it come about.

MD: [00:41:55] There is the officers and then there's the Executive Council and then at that time there were about four of us officers who would actually pick up the phone and call each other. I don't think that exists today, but it was pretty good at the time that there were four or five of us who would actually call each other before taking a position before going to an officers meeting and look for consensus. So, I called John Shields or he'd call me one of us would call Jack Munro who wasn't a big fan of public sector unions but he was recognizing our growing strength and understood that this stuff was hurting his members. He would work with us to come up with the strategy that we could you know effectively fight back. And so, I recall there being the flurry of phone calls then the meeting then the debate. And I I remember saying I can't promise every CUPE member will go out because we have local autonomy and stuff, but I can promise you all I will ask, and I will get the support of my executive board and they will ask and we will send staff and we'll send activists around the province to deliver if everybody else will. And there was some essential service concerns from the health unions.

And we said no we have to do this one-day general strike in a way that doesn't piss off the people that we want support from or put our families or their families at risk. So, we will set our own level of essential services and we will do it higher than the last sort of setting of essential services by the Labour Board. So, we are we aren't going to have I think it was truck or trade with the labour board, but we are going to be guided by what they would normally do.

KR: [00:44:05] Was there anything else about your time as president that really stood out for you.

MD: [00:44:12] The trips to Ottawa were brutal.

MD: [00:44:15] Every four weeks, every six weeks I'd be on a plane. And if it wasn't Ottawa, it'd be Alberta because I as a national vice president I represented both provinces and I was amazed at how different the culture is in Eastern Canada than Western Canada. MD: As President CUPE BC I made connections with Quebec because BC and Quebec had more in common in a trade union sense, in a principled sense of the issues and stuff bringing in a percent per capita at the national level was much harder than doing it at the provincial level. There were cultures there where they saw nothing wrong in the highest paid member in a bargaining unit paying less you know, paying the same as the lowest paid member in a bargaining unit. But if Quebec and BC coalesced on that issue and we brought in a national percent per capita over the objections of a large bloc of Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

KR: [00:45:31] You went on then in 1989 to run for national secretary treasurer could you tell us about that experience what led you to make that decision and tell us about the campaign itself.

MD: [00:45:42] Yeah. At the time the incumbent secretary treasurer announced that he wasn't running again. I had lunch with him in Ottawa. He announced it at a national executive board meeting. He encouraged me to run. I went back to BC and talked to the officers of CUPE BC, some of the senior staff, talked with my family and my family was at that point quite frustrated because I'm literally commuting to the Island and half the weekends, I'm out doing union business so my kids are rarely seeing me. They figured if I was national secretary treasurer, they would see me more. And it did seem because when you're president of CUPE B.C you're not just president of CUPE BC you're on the provincial council the NDP, you're on the Federation Executive Board and you're an officer of the Federation. You're usually an officer of some Labour Council. Some of these were optional but some aren't. Some if you want to continue to be president you just have to do. So, there was a sense that there would be more time for the family if I was successful and if I wasn't successful then I'd go back to my job in Nanaimo and the family would see me more. So it was a win-win by the family. Now I still had a year to go on my term as President of CUPE BC and I could have ran for national secretary treasurer without stepping down. There was no requirement to do that. But I made that decision to step down to run so that I could focus on running and someone else could focus on the job of being president CUPE BC It was also sort of to force I was ready for my next step. I'd been president for five years. I was really ready to move on. By that point I felt we had brought in the percent per capita, we had changed the bylaws, we created the full-time president. The things that I wanted to do sort of what I considered to be the mandate that I went into office with had largely been achieved and so that was part of the reason for the run. And although it was unsuccessful, I was very pleased to see Sister Darcy elected as the secretary treasurer and she went on to be our national president. I went back and

reconnected with friends in the Nanaimo stuff and my wife said if a job comes up, they offered to you. We're prepared to move. You're not totally happy working in the Streets Department of the City.

KR: [00:48:56] And that was in fact what happened in the early 1990s. You had a couple of experiences working in Ontario as a rep in Ontario and later you worked as an executive assistant to the CUPE national president. Can you tell us about those experiences?

MD: [00:49:12] Yeah. There was a choice of Prince George or Windsor and the president at time national president Jeff Rose said I didn't even have to go through an interview just let him know which one I wanted.

MD: [00:49:25] And I talked to one of the shop stewards of the staff union and said can he do this? And they said yeah probably. And I said but what's the proper process you go through an interview, you get certified as being qualified for a position and then it's based on seniority and I said, I don't have any seniority. He says position in Prince George and the position in Windsor may not have any one with seniority applying for them. This isn't Victoria. This isn't Toronto. This isn't one of the hotly contested positions. So I used my own travel points, I used travel points I accumulated. I demanded that they follow the normal procedure. I want to apply to be a rep and be certified and then pick which office I want to apply or I could apply to them both and get offered them both. But I want to do it by the book and that's what happened. And because I'd been a full-time local president, I'd done it arbitrations, I'd sat on an arbitration board for Local 40, the Hotel Restaurant Union when they were running out of money and had more cases and my Local agreed that I could go and sit on the arbitration board for them at no cost. So I was deemed qualified and chose Windsor over Prince George. It was an easy decision, my spouse wanted to pursue her Master's and there was no university at that time in the north. And Windsor had a good reputation for its Master of Education program.

KR: [00:51:23] And how did you end up later being executive assistant to the national president and what was that sort of work like.

MD: [00:51:31] One of the executives Govind Sundram was executive assistant to Judy Darcy who was president at the time and he had diabetes and he ran into a period of time when he couldn't get to whatever the levels balanced. And so, he was off for months and there was this big backlog of issues and stuff.

[MD: 00:52:01] And Judy called me and said would I come for a month or two and lend a hand you know help catch up to files in some temporary EA position. And at that point I think I had just, my wife and I just split. And so I was sort of ready for something different. And my servicing assignment was in good shape. So I wasn't uncomfortable passing it on and I went for what lasted a lot longer than a month or two.

KR: [00:52:42] What sort of work were you doing there?

MD: As a national president's assistant you do a lot of troubleshooting, a lot of problem solving, local issues that are having problems.

MD: [00:53:00] Financial irregularities, you would be involved in recommending whether or not they'd be put under administration maybe recommending who to be the administrator, you

attend a lot of meetings. You're like lives there, I was on the national computer task force I attended all the national executive board meetings, attended all the national executive committee meetings, arranged meetings between the executive assistants of the secretary treasurer and the executive assistant to the president to deal with issues that arise if there are strikes and lockouts. If there are bylaw problems the national president relies on their assistants to prepare the file, to pull all the threads together, prepare recommendations and then once the president makes a decision, you're expected to implement them or work with whoever appropriate, if it's the National Legal department or the communications department that needs to do something and the president's made a decision. The President doesn't have time. CUPE is quite unique in that it only has two full time officers and everybody else is in a bargaining unit except one position. So there are three excluded people in the largest union in Canada with over six hundred and fifty thousand members and God knows how many locals and I had been recommending long before even being Judy's EA they're recommending that this structure be re-examined because we had gone from like 150,000 members to nearly 700,000 members.

MD: [00:54:57] We're still trying to operate it like a mom-and-pop grocery store.

KR: [00:55:04] That was one of the questions that had come up earlier that we had talked about and that was a big part of that growth was while you were president here in British Columbia at least for British Columbia.

KR: [00:55:16] What did that growth look like in BC

MD: In BC we were filling in gaps. We were finding that there were locals who had, there were workplaces where there was a CUPE local and there was a group of unorganized workers who had either been missed at the beginning or using the building block concept of organizing. It was recognized that you might not be able to get the group certified if you went for all of them. So you pick out a block of them that had a community of interest sufficient to get them organized and then CUPE hadn't been all that good at going back and picking up those other units. But you're right it was sort of during that period in the 80s and then into the 90s so certainly carried on by Barry O'Neill making sure that workers, and in some cases, it was a small group like in New West schools I think there was a small group of sort of counsellor coordinators, program coordinators, special ed type people who were sort of had been missed. And so they were organized then added in. So there was that. And then after I came on staff after two years in Windsor I came back, it too which was an independent union was going through significant problems. And I led the merger discussions with the locals in it too. And there was a recommendation we raid them. And I argued against raiding in favour of merging. Meanwhile CAW was organizing to raid them. And we ended up getting the majority of the members merged into CUPE. The Skytrain workers CUPE Local 7000 is one of our really stellar active locals. And it was formerly Local 7 of ICTU. I forget, I think Local 10 ended up being merged into an existing local and another ICTU local out at the airport it came to CUPE. The only group that didn't come to CUPE were the drivers mechanics and the first raid by CAW failed by a narrow margin. And before we could put together a merger proposal that would be acceptable to those members, the CAW ran a second raid and was successful in that raid that I think they still today deal with sort of the aftermath of the raid. Whereas when you merge it's more respectful, there's less baggage.

KR: [00:58:39] You came back to BC I believe in 1999. What did you come back to what was your role when you returned to BC?

MD: '92.

KR: '92 sorry.

MD: [00:58:53] Yes. So my wife was denied a leave of absence so I applied to CUPE for a leave of absence. We're in Windsor right. I've been there two years and in the collective agreement for the staff you have to serve two years or repay moving costs and stuff that the employer would pay. So, you make a commitment to stay for at least two years.

MD: [00:59:18] So unfortunately that two years coincided with the net denial of my spouse's leave of absence. So we had a quick discussion and I didn't think she should have to give up her seniority and we were sort of you know ready. The kids had seen Niagara Falls and <unclear> had spent two years really part of why we'd taken that job was for that sort of experience and we felt we had achieved it. So I applied to CUPE for a leave of absence and we made plans move back and stuff. And meanwhile Judy Armstrong was on a temporary assignment in Ottawa working on a campaign with CBC staff. And there was a bunch of stuff going on at that time in the communications sector and the person backfilling her position in Victoria was denied a leave of absence. And CUPE needed to fill that position temporarily until Judy was done. So I was told although my leave of absence was granted it was on the condition that I fill in for a month or two while Judy's on this other campaign because they lost their temporary rep they had in there because they couldn't get a leave. That lasted thirteen months. Then CUPE a temporary assignment may last a long time.

KR: Where did you go after that?

MD: So while I was in Victoria I serviced all the school board locals, Camosun college, UVic and Craigdarroch Castle employees had a union so I got to bargain in a castle. And so from there I applied for, a vacancy came up and part of the deal on my leave of absence was I had to agree to apply for any vacancy in BC that came up. There was a vacancy in servicing the Fraser Valley out of the Burnaby office servicing all the munis, municipal locals and that's where I come from. So I was quite happy to apply for that. I got accepted and then for six more months I was still in Victoria every month thinking OK I'll be going soon. But I had an apartment in Victoria but I commuted back from Forth to Nanaimo two, three times a week. And then when Judy finally sort of finished the campaign she was on back east and came back, I went to the Burnaby office and I had the assignment we called Beyond Hope because we actually serviced Spuzzum which is just beyond Hope BC

KR: And what were you doing in that assignment?

MD: I was servicing municipal locals and I think I also had the TMA, the Transit Management Association, CUPE 2500. I think somehow, they just sort of slid it over and all of a sudden I found I had this other bargaining unit. Everything else was the municipal locals all the way out to Agassiz, Harrison, Kent and as I said Spuzzum.

KR: How long did that assignment go on for?

MD: Almost five years. I sort of have this five-year pattern in my career. The nice thing about with CUPE is I can sort of reinvent myself every five years. So Joe Denofreo had taken ill and he was the university sector coordinator looking after UBC and SFU. And so I got asked if I would switch assignments and take that assignment. At that point I had all my collective agreements negotiated, my WCB appeals is up to date as I could, I really had worked hard to get this assignment in shape and I initially said no I'm not moving I just got it sort of organized. And of course, then knowing Joe I heard that if I didn't take it, then when Joe got out of the hospital and he'd just go back into it and that sort of was the final motivator for me to take that assignment.

KR: [01:04:12] Were you involved politically during the 1990s?

MD: Politically?

KR: Within the NDP primarily.

MD: Oh yes. Well yeah. When you become a trade unionist you also become a political activist. So I work on leadership campaigns during that time, supporting people largely unsuccessfully. I attended I think I attended almost every NDP provincial and federal convention from about 1976 maybe '78 until the last couple of years.

MD: [01:05:04] I think we're probably just about ready to move on to the to the 2000s. I wonder if that would be the time to take a brief five-minute break.

KN: [01:05:13] Well Mike we talked about the general strike on June 1st 1987. That was basically against Bill 19. There was another bill, Bill 20 that really dramatically affected teachers. You might remember that they took a one-day protest action on April 28. Were you involved in that any way? So can you tell us.

MD: [01:05:39] Yes. We were involved in the fight back against Bill 20 as partners with teachers we represented probably 20,000 support staff workers back then and there was a big rally I think it was at the PNE. I was asked to speak I was expecting to speak to four or five thousand teachers. The size of a group that I had spoken to at national conventions and in other protest sand got up on the stage and saw the sea of teachers there was apparently like 20,000 of them. My wife at the time was a teacher and she the night before had given me clear instructions about you know this was going to be on TV, the kids are going to see it. You know my colleagues are going to see you know you've got to be you know be very clear on what you're saying and don't use profanity. You know I got all the instructions. And yeah, the mood was awesome. The feeling of solidarity. And Dennis McGann was one of our support staff and he had been instrumental in doing posters. And he helped me sort of put together my speakers notes and stuff. And I don't even think I needed to look at the notes it just flowed. You know that you pick up on the passion and the mood and you go with it.

KN: [01:07:20] OK. You might just my follow up question I just want you to comment on this Mike because this is backed by recollections of the time is that teachers because I was a teacher activist at this time. We saw you as the new face of CUPE. You were really quite different from what our understanding in our relationship with CUPE was before you came on the scene and you developed really close working relationships with the BC Teachers Federation.

MD: [01:07:53] Yes there have been difficulties between teachers and support staff. There have been strikes where teachers would cross picket lines. Teachers were becoming more active as trade unionists in the time leading up to April 28. And certainly, I think that was a culminating moment. And part of my speaking there was to emphasize the importance of solidarity that we had common cause and that we needed to support each other. And it paid dividends in future strikes both by teachers and support staff. There was more solidarity there was better coordination. I think we both achieved better collective agreements as a result of that solidarity.

KR: [01:08:50] OK Mike CUPE has long been a strong supporter of the NDP. And running up to the NDP's loss of government here in British Columbia in 2001, CUPE had some difficulties with the NDP. Would you like to comment on that?

MD: [01:09:10] Oh the NDP and the labour movement have had a rocky relationship as far back as I can remember. When they're in opposition they are far better at...not just better, they seem more comfortable defending labour rights. They seem able to understand and appreciate our positions. When they get into government, they feel obligated to you know sort of balance between labour and employers and government is an employer and they become more like employers and less like the NDP that was formed by the labour movement and the co-operative movement, farmers, you know the CCF was the roots of the NDP. And yeah, so we we've been legislated. CUPE locals have been legislated back to work usually education locals as I recall.

MD: [01:10:32] And there was a time when there was a settlement in the air, 24 hours is what CUPE asked for and was denied that the government invoked the...passed the legislation ordering the workers back to work literally at the 11th hour of a settlement. And that has left bitterness.

MD: [01:10:59] There has been a movement inside the NDP for years to try and kick labour out of its sort of what they consider preferential positions like we're guaranteed certain seats in the provincial executive board, we're consulted, we're placed on the policy committees so that labour can have real input and there is a faction within the NDP that would rather we just send them money and shut up and stay out of the way.

KR: [01:11:30] And then came 2001, and the election of the new Liberal government. What was their response to that?

MD: [01:11:42] Well there were those of us in the labour movement who felt the NDP had run a disastrous campaign. They had not staked clear ground. When Glen Clark was elected there was a campaign that was clear and cogent and labour could support it. It wasn't giving us everything we asked for but it was on key issues clear commitments that allowed us to mobilize our members. Gave us the rationale that members needed to hear in order to make that decision because other than maybe the HEU the rest of the labour movement generally reflect the rest of the population in terms of support for the liberal sort of non-liberal, you know the Social Credit reinvention as a provincial liberal but not as a real liberal. And the NDP.

KR: [01:12:50] In 2002. The government brought in three pieces of legislation one dealing with teachers and one dealing with college educators I believe, and I don't even remember what the third one was.

KN: Health care.

KR: Health care of course.

KR: [01:13:06] How did that how did that affect CUPE?

MD: [01:13:10] Well in an.

MD: [01:13:13] Is this about the Judy Corbin commission?

KN: This would have been the 28 and 29 in 2002. Stripping the HEU and BCTF collective agreements.

MD: [01:13:32] And successorship. Yes. And CUPE would have been more affected in the health sector than probably any other sector and made common cause with the others I remember there being combined meetings of staff lawyers from the BCTF and HEU and CUPE. And there was a very, very successful legal battle. There was a debate within the labour movement whether we should do the legal battle. There is a high distrust of the courts and there are those of us who felt that maybe what we needed to do was mobilize members into a general strike. But the sort of more conservative elements of the labour movement won the day on the decision and as it turned out they were right. We got precedent setting rulings. And today workers are benefiting and unions are benefiting from those legal decisions that arose out of that.

KR: [01:14:55] One of the responses from CUPE was the creation of the Strong Communities Working Group in 2002.

KR: [01:15:04] Could you tell us what that was and what your role was?

MD: Yeah. This strong the Strong Communities Working Group was formed as much because we had a couple of our one senior staff rep from Ontario came out and worked with, I think it was Neil Bradbury they did a tour of CUPE locals to do an assessment of what our capacity was, capacity to mobilize our members in our own disputes, and capacity to mobilize our members in solidarity disputes like for the teachers and the health care workers and stuff. There was an assessment that we were at about 50 percent.

MD: [01:15:51] And this shocked us because we thought of ourselves as being more militant and we thought ourselves of being more prepared. We found locals didn't have phone trees or that they had phone trees that were so out of date as to be useless. We found that there were locals who hadn't been able to fill executive positions and were running with partial executives, local's activists' bases had shrunk. And so one of the mandates of Strong Communities Group was to help reinvigorate locals and help them build capacity.

MD: [01:16:29] So we had and also to more effectively campaign in a coordinated way around issues like privatization, contracting out sort of key issues that we recognize that we can't win

those battles by ourselves. We need the community and we need the other unions in the community on board working with us. And where we knew from history where we had done that in the past, we had won. We had actually had work contracted back in and we had work that they wanted to contract out. We had municipal politicians backing away very quickly particularly if there was a municipal election in the near future. So that's you know that was Strong Communities was sort of a way of coordinating a number of campaigns that were already in existence creating new campaigns and doing membership engagement outreach and helping locals rebuild capacity.

KR: [01:17:42] One of those campaigns was the Solidarity vote. Can you tell us about that?

MD: [01:17:48] Well yeah. We called all the presidents of all the locals together because there's no point in building capacity if you aren't going to use it, and to use capacity we had learned from previous strikes and protests that membership need confidence that they're going to get backing. You're going to ask someone to give up a day's pay, they need to know it's going to mean something, that it's more than just pissing in the wind. Forgive me for that expression. Yeah, that would be one that I wouldn't be told to use before speaking to the teachers.

MD: [01:18:36] So I'm sorry.

MD: Just the solidarity vote asked each of the locals to make a commitment.

MD: [01:18:44] Yeah. So local presidents were brought together from all over the province in the Lower Mainland. CUPE B.C paid their expenses and costs to bring them there. We presented them with a resolution, a solidarity resolution that if an employer attacked one local that that local would respond and if the employer did not cease its attack, then the locals within that region would come out in solidarity in support of those workers, that local. MD: If the employers still persisted then it would essentially escalate to all of CUPE coming out. And there was a provision within it that not only would we come out in support of each other but if other unions are attacked and ask for support that we would support them if they go out in a region and we go out in that region with them if they go out provincially then we go out provincially with them.

KR: [01:19:59] How successful was the effort to get those locals involved and what was done to accomplish that?

MD: [01:20:07] Well it was amazing. I think at one point felt that we had achieved about 85 to 90 percent capacity. Coming out of that solidarity vote we had local presidents saying I don't think I can get my executive to agree and I don't think I can get my members out and I don't even know how I would get them out because I don't have a tree list or you know, I've never done this before. I'm a new president what do I do? So the Strong Communities team was made up of a communicator Ron Verzuh for most of my time as the coordinator. We had a researcher who's sitting here with me, Keith Reynolds. We had educators who would go out and run courses. We had a special projects coordinator who would go out and actually help local presidents create the phone trees and build the plan around how they would mobilize the members. The communication staff came up with ways in which solidarity could be built in the community so that in ice arenas in different communities locals rented space either to put messages, social justice messages, solidarity messages on the boards of the arena and in a

couple of cases right in the ice. It was sort of neat to see locals held special days in support of other unions or community groups. There was the Save Our Services coalitions that locals became part of and in some cases, locals were a founding force in it. In other cases, teachers or health care workers that had mobilized groups in the community as support groups and CUPE became part of those groups. The Days of Defiance on Vancouver Island were led by coalitions. They weren't led by the labour movement. It was a coalition of community groups that came together sort of reminiscent of Operation Solidarity without the sort of bad taste afterwards.

KR: [01:22:39] In 2004 the Hospital Employees' Union went on strike and that was the first time that the Solidarity vote was invoked. Why did that happen? And can you tell us about the process and the result?

MD: [01:22:59] We were asked for support. We also had locals coming to us even before HEU asked for support saying we want to support our sisters and brothers and in the HEU, how do we do that? What's our plan? Can we. Can we invoke the Solidarity Vote? And there was actually a debate because the way it was set up we can't just go out in solidarity with another union unless the other union wants us to. And we had to explain that. So there was internal debate and discussion but eventually we got a clear request. We went out in support, and I think we had almost 98 percent of our members were out in support of the HEU.

KR: [01:24:00] That was quite an accomplishment.

MD: It felt amazing. And the thing that I thought was so important was if they can do that in support of another union then they've just affirmed to themselves and to their employers you mess with us, if we can deliver that just imagine what we can do if you come after us. That was an important message.

KR: Was there any blowback from the government because of that?

MD: Oh there was blowback from some employers. They tried to discipline our members in some cases. Members had letters put on their file. The union went to bat for them. I can remember a case where the union won. The employer would have been forced to remove the letters and the members demanded the letters be kept as a badge of honour that they were quite happy to have a letter acknowledging that they'd taken that action. The more interesting thing was the teachers' dispute. And when we went out and supported the teachers there was a 11th hour settlement and we were asked to stand down and our locals wouldn't. And there was a big rally at the PNE and the government had threatened us with all sorts of terrible stuff none of which they then did because in the face of solidarity in the face of real solidarity government is going to blink.

KR: [01:25:40] That was in 2005 when the teachers went?

MD: Yes, that was the following year.

KR: And there wasn't unanimous agreement among the trade union movement as to how to respond to that.

[MD: 01:25:54] No some of the calls asking CUPE to stand down were from other unions.

KR: And there was I understand there was also some disagreement at the Federation level.

MD: [01:26:07] I remember Barry coming to me and I'd received a call from senior staff from another union and Barry came to me and said very clearly what CUPE's position was we're going to go up and we're going to be in some (audio missing). And if the rest of the labour movement doesn't want to support the teachers, shame on them. That was his very clear message and I said well I had this call from another senior staff person saying I should try and persuade you to be a little less forceful and dramatic and you know I was respectful to them you know.

KR: [01:26:50] And they were also you were also going out and organizing as I believe at that time to get our locals to...

MD: [01:26:57] There was a case where the Federation sent one of their senior staff to a community meeting that Barry sent me to. And their role was to persuade people not to take action. And my role was to persuade people to take action. And it was the first time I'd been in that situation. And we became very good friends after that.

KR: [01:27:28] Mike you retired in 2009 and I'm going to go through a number of positions that you held over your time with CUPE. I'm going to ask you to think about, this is probably going to be a tough question but I'm going to ask you to think about what your proudest moment was in the time you served in that role. There's probably many of them but I'm going to start with your role as a representative.

MD: [01:27:52] My first arbitration was representing a sister who worked at a hospital.

MD: [01:28:02] And she'd been knocked down from full time to part time. She was a single parent. And she called in sick to hospital but she was also on the call list and picking up shifts elsewhere in order to make enough money to pay the rent and feed her kids. And she didn't have sick leave at that other place. And the policy at the other place was if you don't accept the call you go to the bottom of the list. So she worked while she was sick at this other place. The employer found out, found out that this had happened on a number of occasions and fired her. And that was my first arbitration, solo arbitration myself. And we won that case and she not only got her part time job back but we persuaded the arbitrator to also allow her to have seniority for the shift she would have worked. And that was enough seniority that when she returned to work, she returned to a full time position. And I think that was probably my proudest moment. Tears in her eyes and mine.

KR: What about during your time as the university's coordinator?

MD: The creation of the Universities Coordinating Committee which I persuaded CUPE to include university workers who weren't in a CUPE local, that were in other unions so that we would actually meet and coordinate in this sector in a way that Ken and I had been pushing might happen at the BC Federation. But we never quite got there. But for this sector we actually had and it still exists today a Coordinating Committee that involves multiple unions in that sector.

KR: [01:30:02] And your time is legislative coordinator?

MD: [01:30:07] My time as legislative coordinator was an exciting time for me because it was a big shift. I was doing far more research analysis, writing position papers. I was part of policy committees at the NDP. Leading up to us not forming the government unfortunately but we had hoped and worked with people like did Dave Vipond who really has an entirely different approach than I do. But when we actually came to work together on policy, we could find common ground. And we were able to get some good policy positions put forward and passed at NDP conventions so that that was new for me. Before attending an NDP convention, my role was to help whip our vote. You know we'd be told what our position is on an issue and whip a vote. But this was actually a chance to have influence in and see the presentation of a position that you've helped develop and support. And it's a lot easier to whip people to support something like that because you have an intimate relationship with the issue.

KR: [01:31:36] What about your time as Strong Communities coordinator?

MD: [01:31:42] I was awed by the staff I worked with on that committee and by the degree to which the president and secretary treasurer trusted us, entrusted us. We had a million-dollar budget not just for one year but in multiple years. We had the resources if we said we needed \$500,000 to produce - to book people off jobs and produce communications material and take out ads and stuff. We never had to fight for it. It was there. The support was there, it was awesome and the staff who worked on that yourself included. I mean we don't have hours of work in our collective agreement as staff at CUPE but you're not expected to work twelve hours a day, six days a week. But during the Strong Communities Campaign there were many weeks when staff were in the office before... the Strong Communities staff were there before everyone and in the evening, they were out meeting with locals, delivering courses doing whatever the Strong Communities plan was. The other thing was it was the most strategic thing I've ever done in my years in the labour movement is we annually had a think tank within a think tank. CUPE BC as the executive think tank, Strong Communities has its own think tank beforehand to develop timeline strategies, critical paths and then those are informed and become part of the executive board think tank so that we build a common sort of strategy that's based in reality. Staff have actually done the research; we've costed it and we're not just asking for pie in the sky and we got total support.

KR: [01:34:00] And your time is executive assistant to the president in Ottawa?

MD: [01:34:04] That was sort of special being able to work with Judy Darcy. I was totally amazed at her capacity to handle multiple gigantic, gigantic issues, to work with staff under very tense often critical times and not flip out at us. I mean my experience with other national officers even as and while I was National the vice president was there would be times when the crunch came, when the pressure was so intense and staff were usually the whipping board. Not so with Judy. And if I needed clarification on something she was patient. She would work it through with me. If I came and was pushing something and thought it should go a certain way and she was initially resistant, she heard me out and sometimes changed her position. That's special and you build a special relationship. We were friends to this day.

KR: [01:35:24] And finally your high point. From the time that you were CUPE BC president.

MD: [01:35:34] When, I think it was when we passed the full-time president and passed the percent per capita and amended and we made major changes to the bylaws. I think we

created the library working group or in the library task force at that time I think we created a couple important committees. I think we added some diversity to our executive board. That convention for me as a convention I'll never forget. One other convention was pretty special was when I was honoured with a life membership in CUPE BC.

MD: [01:36:16] But I think the first one even more so because the legacy there is still there today.

KR: [01:36:25] You've had a life outside of CUPE and part of that life was a really major role that you played with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Can you tell us about that?

MD: [01:36:38] Yes it started out with Colleen being the member on the BC board for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and I at the time I was the legislative coordinator, so I was the logical person in that sense. I was also, Colleen and I had a long, long history of supporting each other and similar viewpoints on things so she asked me to attend some meetings that she couldn't make so that there would still be someone there from CUPE. I think I attended about six cities before Seth and maybe even Ken, that a couple of people said why aren't you on the committee. Colleen's so busy and she can't be here it makes sense for you to be the person. So that's how I ended up becoming a representative on the BC board and I ended up on the national CCPA board in part I think because Murray Dobbin just wouldn't let some issues slide but the board felt we really needed a voice at the national level and we needed to start solving some things. And I was asked to do it and I was honoured and I think we did some really good work certainly over the life of the BC board CCPA has grown phenomenally in British Columbia. It has a unique position of credibility for a think tank that is largely funded by the labour movement, but a think tank largely funded by any group has trouble getting a lot of credibility. But the things that were put in place, the peer reviews just the process of producing a report recommendations for government is so rigorous that even the mainstream media are comfortable using materials produced by the CCPA.

KR: [01:39:02] CUPE as an organization as a union has been a lot more politically active than a number of other unions. Why is that and where did it come from?

MD: [01:39:13] When I first became president of a local union there was a motion on the floor that we were not allowed to talk about politics. And I remember stepping out of the chair going down to the floor and saying how far do you want us to go. And do you realize what it means if you decide you're not going to be involved in politics. The municipal council members who want to privatize your job are going to be running for re-election in a year. You don't want to local involved in that? Well, you can just, there was a hush in the room and you could hear and then sort of the clink clink-clink of people thinking that "no, we don't want our jobs contracted out. If we have to be politically active to try and stop it, we should be politically active. So I didn't push the envelope too far and that motion was defeated another motion came forward that we were to be politically active and money was passed to allow us to be politically active in the next municipal election. I thought of going after allowing us to be politically active in provincial elections but a couple members of the executive and I had a quick huddle and decided we're going to take the win we got. And then when the provincial election rolled around, I wrote a personal letter as president the local.

MD: [01:40:51] Asking members to carefully think about the issues, setting up the issues that were important to us, setting out to position the NDP on these issues, setting out the Sacred position on those issues and that was essentially all we did in politics that year. Four years later, the next election the motion came from the floor.

MD: [01:41:16] It did not come from the executive that we actively support the NDP and the local MLA who was an incumbent NDP.

MD: [01:41:29] My first year as president CUPE BC, maybe it was the second year, the first election anyway Bernice and I wrote a joint letter to all the locals encouraging them to be active in the election, setting out the issues, the two sides everything and at the following convention we actually got permission to affiliate a portion of our members to the NDP.

KR: [01:42:04] Mike you and I have talked in the past about how important Union education is for you. Could you tell us why it was important for you, why is it important for unions and why was it important for CUPE?

MD: [01:42:18] Well my first my first course as a union activist was newsletter editing course for trade unionists as put in Naramata. This is at a time when I'm thinking that's all my involvement in the union's going to be is I'm just going to do this newsletter for them. And after a week of intense training and socialization with other trade unionists and the evening social justice issue speakers and other issues are raised, I went back to the local already primed to become more active and more involved in my union. That course was followed with the Labour Advocacy course, an Arbitration course, a Communications course, Political Action course. Probably over my time in my early years as staff well even as an officer because we had the ranking officers' courses the speakers come in and stuff, that union education was the foundation for me to draw upon in my work and I became a union educator when I came on staff. I taught the stewarding course, I taught the basic collective bargaining course, the advanced collective bargaining course I co-wrote a course with Judy Armstrong who was the education rep on respect in the workplace, I taught courses on respect in the workplace. I remember going to Salt Spring Island and the school district there was a real problem between front line managers and stewards and the employer putting pressure on both to do things which were counter productive and the employer finally realizing they had created a problem and they didn't know how to solve it. So it was actually the employer and the union who contacted CUPE BC and contacted MD: Judy and asked if we could come and put a course on for frontline managers and stewards on how to solve problems and how to make the grievance system work. They were trying to go into arbitration. So yeah. And those are those are all fond memories.

KR: [01:44:59] One of the other events that you've talked to me about happened at the time that you were President of CUPE BC and you were representing the labour movement and you and Mike Harcourt spoke to a peace rally at Nanoose Bay. Was that important to you?

MD: [01:45:16] Yes. I never quite sort of formed a judgment of the Vietnam conflict. It was something I was still having sort of flashbacks and stuff occasionally. I had a sense that I had been used in some nefarious way but that there was no clear cogent understanding of both why the conflict happened what the real agenda was and as I became a trade unionist, I started connecting with war resisters and connecting with people of conscience who opposed the war. Then I started reading about the war. I hadn't done that you know. There was this

almost 8–10-year gap. This was something I tried to put out of my mind as if it was just a bad dream. And it was around the time that sort of it crystallized for me just how wrong that was and how unnecessary it was. And there were these protests going on in Nanoose Bay and I got this call saying you want to go with Mike and will you represent the labour movement and speak at this rally. I said I would be honoured. And that's how they came about.

KR: [01:47:02] Can you tell us a little bit about the rally itself?

MD: [01:47:05] There were trade unionists there were community activists. I think there was a couple hundred people. And I don't know if you know Nanoose Bay but you know you're sort of beside the Island Highway there because there isn't a whole lot of room. And we've got a shitty P.A. system, but people are being very strong and passionate about you know the submarines we don't know whether they're carrying nuclear weapons or not. This is before ... no this is after Mike was mayor and after Vancouver was declared a nuclear weapons free zone because I remember him, that was a large part of what he was talking about. There was also this sense that this wasn't a secret place, but it was largely ignored. You didn't read about it, a whole lot of people even in and around Nanoose Bay didn't even know that there were these submarines going in and out of Nanoose Bay. So that was part of what we were trying to do was put a spotlight, say to people "do you know this is what's going on here? And it's not necessary. And we want them out." That was sort of the message we delivered.

KR: What year was that?

MD: [01:48:57] I'm thinking it's '88.

KN: I think somewhere in that time period.

KR: [01:49:01] I think that was really an example of unions being involved in social justice issues. Do unions have a role in social justice issues?

MD: [01:49:12] Absolutely. I mean I can remember a CLC convention where the Defence Department union, the union representing Defence Department were very upset with one of our peace resolutions or whatever. And that convention it was overwhelming. It was respectful. We respected their concerns. We made sure that within the resolution there was recognition of rights and obligations to those workers that they should be able to transition into equally well-paying and equally secure jobs. But with all due respect we disagreed on the issue of continuing to build a war machine in Canada which makes not only from a justice point of view is wrong but it makes no sense.

KR: [01:50:13] What is CUPE's role in the broader labour movement?

MD: [01:50:20] As the largest union in Canada it has, I believe, an obligation not only to provide leadership but also to provide assistance to other unions particularly in the private sector. And CUPE has been doing a bit more of that. CUPE locals have helped. Private sector locals organize have gone to their members who have relatives in the target group to be organized and talk to them. I don't think we're doing it as well as we could or should. But I think that's the role of the larger unions because the US is now down to 11 percent trade union density. And that means that the society is less just. We were at 43 percent when I started to work here in BC that the labour movement had 43 percent density. I'm told we're

now down at around 30. With each percentage point of density that we lose, we lose that influence in society wage inequality increases, gender inequality increases, the anti-racism and xenophobia and all the other sort of things that every union that I've been involved in or know about has programs with its members. And generally, if you look within a union membership you find less of those negative things. And so that to me is the role of CUPE to be a leader in those fields and to do outreach and assist and not only just other unions with less resources and not just in organizing campaigns but also community groups and other people in society who may not have the same enfranchisement. They may not have the same capacity to speak on their own injustice or to seek justice on their own.

MD: [01:52:47] That's the role of unions.

KR: We've been talking today about your history in the labour movement. Is it important for union members and activists to know something about the history of their own union and the history of the labour movement in general?

MD: [01:53:05] I think it's critical and certainly I joined the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association while I was a local president in Nanaimo, went to my first conference in Victoria, came away from that conference knowing more about the labour movement than I that the additional knowledge I require was greater than the sum that I had amassed previously. And so it's to me crucial I think sometimes we focus too much on the personalities. I had my ups and downs with Ken Georgetti and I have heard other trade unionists totally focus on the negative or weaknesses that Ken may have had as president of the Fed. And to me that harms us as a movement. I think we need to be honest and acknowledge where we've been less than perfect which is often. But we need to do it respectfully and we need to understand that attacking and tearing down a particular leader for a particular reason as much as I think Owen didn't do certain things well and didn't do things, I thought he should have I believe he did what he thought was best for the movement and certainly under his leadership some good stuff happened. And so when members asked me, I even now I'll run into a retired CUPE member from back in the day and they'll ask me "have you heard from <unclear> whatever and I say no Owen I don't know where he is. He's sort of moved on. But while he was president some good things happened and some bad things happened and you should not just focus on the bad, that doesn't build a movement.

KR: Mike you're retired now.

MD: Sort of.

KR: But you're not you're not un-busy.

MD: No I feel like I'm busier now than at some points during my working life.

KR: [01:55:11] And one of those things that you're very active in is table tennis. And earlier we were having a conversation about some of the things being involved in table tennis had done for you and for the community. Could you talk about that for a minute?

MD: [01:55:27] Well certainly growing up recreation departments had table ping pong tables were called then. And I guess still called ping pong tables and rec centres and table tennis clubs, you tend to play a different style of play and less <unclear> back and forth. There's

more dramatic shots made, you play far from the table move up close the table. There's a strict strategy to playing table tennis that isn't necessarily apparent to the uninitiated. But there's what's called the three-ball attack where you serve expecting a certain type of response and then your next shot is to be a put away shot a strong vigorous forehand attack. There's the flick, the loop, the forehand drive, backhand drive, forehand push, backhand push, backspin, forehand backspin, backhand backspin. I've actually taken the level one coaching course the Canada Coaching Association in Table Tennis Canada of course and I'm certified to teach basics and it's not ping pong.

KR: But you talked earlier about working with some people in the community.

MD: Yeah there are a couple of women in the North Shore. One is a former Czechoslovakia, a Slovakian a junior national champ who is now a certified Level 3 coach and she's a coach certifier and coach evaluator and she and her partner started the North Shore Table Tennis Club. And I met them and we connected well and they asked me if I could give them a hand with some stuff and we ended up... they had formed a society but they hadn't done anything with it was like a society on paper only with five names. So I got involved with them the society now has hundreds of members. I've helped them get grants from VIA sport and other things for things like teaching coaches to get her to teach. We've got some young players who probably realise that they're not good enough to eventia;;u be a national player but they could eventually become a national coach or a national umpire. They could still have a career in table tennis if they love it. So we've been putting on those sort of courses. We've been (audio missing) some programming in the community during school hours, an introduction to table tennis, after school table tennis clubs and the one I'm really excited about we call Happy Hands. It's an adaptive table tennis program for students with special needs. And there are studies that we had read that talked about it being a brain sport that the cognitive abilities for students with special challenges this helps them exceed their current capacities. As a senior both you should know that table tennis is also been proven to delay onset of Alzheimer's and the physical health of the seniors who play table tennis is greater than those who don't. It's what they call a life sport, you can play your entire life and in fact one of the players that I play doubles with, Marta Nye is in her 80s and she wins gold medals at world veteran table tennis tournaments. She travels all over the world, been to Europe, New York City, Las Vegas. She is just very active. One of the coaches at the North Shore Club is a retired National coach who's 85 years old and Frank still coaches still, doesn't play competitively anymore. We have a seniors League Thursday afternoon seniors League with four teams in it and the person at the top rank is not me. It is Arn Coleman a retired principal, administrator who is 78 years old.

KR: [02:00:23] Mike I'm going to ask you to blow your horn just a little bit. You've won a few medals yourself.

MD: Yes. Over the last sort of three and a half, four years I've amassed about four trophies and six medals, I think.

KR: [02:00:41] Retirement. I'm going to ask you one final question, I guess. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about your career in the labour movement that we haven't touched on today or we're just some closing thoughts.

MD: [02:00:58] Well I owe a debt of gratitude to the members who placed trust in me and elected me to positions. Then to the officers who hired me and I can't imagine having a better

career where every five or six years I got to tackle something new, went on a new adventure and in some cases, you know when I became Legislative Coordinator I had more doubts about my capacity to do the job than the officers. They decided I could do the job and I guess that gave me the confidence enough, but it was a steep learning curve because I had never thought about legislation in that sense and I didn't really, I thought I knew the workings of government. I'd been politically active and stuff but you know how are meeting with the Premier's Chief of Staff and being told that you can ask this question and you can't ask that question. It was not on the agenda when I took that job. So there it was a great learning thing. And today I draw on those skills that I've learned in the CUPE job in my work as a community activist. You know both with the table tennis club and the West End Community Association and even with the CCPA. I still occasionally get to dabble in labour relations. When the H.R. person encounters something it's a little odd or challenging, I get a call and sometimes a free lunch.

KR: [02:02:54] Bailey or Ken do you have any follow up questions.

BG: [02:02:58] I want to thank you for sitting down with us. It's a great interview.

MD: [02:03:04] Yes it was. Thank you. And we did it before a quarter to 1.