

Interview: Kristina Vandervoort (KV)

Interviewer: Patricia Wejr (PW)

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Transcription: Jane Player (JP)

PW [00:00:05] Today is April 27th, 2023. My name is Patricia Wejr. I'm a volunteer with the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre, and I'm very pleased to be speaking to Kristina Vandervoort today. Kristina, could we start off with just a little bit of your personal background, like where you were born and where you grew up?

KV [00:00:24] Well, yes, I was born in Stockholm, Sweden, and I lived there with my parents and family until we moved to Canada, and I was about eight and a half at the time.

PW [00:00:40] Did you move right to B.C.?

KV [00:00:43] Yes, first to Vancouver and then a little while later to North Vancouver.

PW [00:00:50] So that's where you spent most of your time growing up?

KV [00:00:53] Yes.

PW [00:00:56] Thinking back about your early life, what influences may have there been that led to your activism? Did you have family history or anything like that? How did you become an activist?

KV [00:01:10] Well, I think as a child, even like in Sweden, we'd be exposed to Sunday dinners at my grandparents, and we had different family members with different political views and involvements. My grandfather had been very involved with Social Democrats at the founding because Sweden was a very poor country in the early parts of the 1900s. One aunt, her husband, my dad's eldest sister, he was communist. Actually, when he was a very small little boy, they had harboured Lenin when he came through Sweden. He was very quiet and very nice. He was a bricklayer and my aunt, his wife, she was like a left wing social democrat. My grandmother, she was, I guess, more a right wing liberal and it was just interesting. My dad didn't say too much, you know, but he was always—so there was engaging conversations. I always found that, as a child, very interesting. Of course, when we came to Canada, everything was so different, but we did have friends that were more politically involved. Some of them and some family members became union members, you know, such as the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] and then a Local 170, Plumbers and Pipefitters. There was that influence. I felt that unions, you know, they were—and in Sweden, they always were respected. With that and social democratic policies such as I went to a government childcare and school. There were lunches, free lunches for children. They would have dentists and doctors come and check on us and that, so they were taking care of those needs for everyone. I think that's where my political involvement came, as well as my mom was president of a founding co-op in our suburb of Stockholm. There would be women meeting at our home. It was just something that was quite familiar to me. Yeah.

PW [00:04:06] When you got to North Vancouver, where did you go to school?

KV [00:04:12] Well, actually I went to school for a short time in Vancouver Renfrew. When we came here first, I couldn't speak English at all. My older siblings could because they had taken it in school or—and my oldest sister, she had also taken other languages because she was older. The kids there in the neighbourhood didn't like me or—I had a nephew who was four years younger than me. We just couldn't speak English and so they threw rocks at us. It was a bit scary. Then we moved to North Vancouver, Upper Lonsdale area, and so I went to school, and I had a difficult time with North Star. Mr. Pederson was a teacher there, K.G. Pederson. Then of course, he became much later president of UBC. He spoke Danish, and I could understand Danish because we had some family members that were Norwegian and then also Danish friends. He spoke to me, so that was very helpful. Then he got me into what would have been an ESL [English as a second language] class. There was one in North Vancouver at Ridgeway, and that was from kids my age, and maybe a bit younger to probably those that were about 17 years of age. All in this one, and that was a little old schoolhouse that they had at Ridgeway. I was there for the rest of that year, and then I just went on to regular classes. Then just various schools in North Vancouver and then graduated from Carson Graham.

PW [00:06:09] When and where did you first start working?

KV [00:06:12] Well, I guess my first real job was in Grade 10, and it was a Tobin shoe store on Lonsdale near 15th. Helping there for stock—do some stocking and then selling shoes. I did that 'till I started—after I graduated and then started to work at Lions Gate Hospital.

PW [00:06:37] What was your first job at Lions Gate?

KV [00:06:40] It was a clerk 1—so just helping with some mail and some, you know, a bit of accounts payable. They realized that I had learnt to use the Burrough's bookkeeping machine at Carson Graham School so then they upgraded me to a grade, clerk 2. Then this huge bookkeeping machine and you posted all the invoices, did your accounts payable and cheque register, and do the trial balance, etcetera. I did that and then after that I worked there for a few years in that position and then later senior outpatient clerk for a few years and then after that the position of head cashier came up. I thought I should be able to apply for that and I was told no. I was rejected because I was too young. I was—'cuz the other person who had had it retired at 65. I was asked, 'How can you deal with the public?' I said, 'Well, I sold shoes.' I was okay with that. Then I was told, 'Well, you're going to have to deal with the bereaved. How will you handle that?' I said, 'I think I will be able to handle that. That should be fine.' Anyway, I didn't get the job, so I grieved it. By that time, I had been going to my union meetings and getting involved. Then I think I'd even been to my first convention. We had a new director of personnel, and she was very supportive. She said, 'Absolutely, we can't discriminate because of age.' So, I got that position.

PW [00:08:55] Do you remember what age you were?

KV [00:08:57] I was about, I guess I was around 26. Yeah. Even at that age, I was like—I mean, it just seemed bizarre.

PW [00:09:11] Yes. When you said you had gone to meetings, etcetera, so did somebody that you work with say, why don't you come to a meeting or you saw—

KV [00:09:21] Well, yes. We would go downstairs in the cafeteria, for coffee break, some lunch. Sometimes our manager would join us. If she didn't, then one of the senior staff

members (she was in charge of accounts receivable), was involved on the executive and she was secretary-treasurer of the local. She would speak about different issues, and she would encourage us to come to the meetings. Then when there would be someone who would have a problem. 'Oh, what happened, what happened?' Finally, she would say, 'Look, you need to come to a meeting. I can't be explaining everything to you. You need to show up.' I thought, 'Yeah, absolutely. We need to be involved.' So I did. She was extremely supportive and encouraged me to stand for trustee. She said, 'Oh, you can do that. Look at the financial part of it. Just be our trustee.' Then after that, 'Well, I think you should be a shop steward.' Then after that, she had to go on vacation for a longer period of time and she needed someone to take over as secretary-treasurer. I said, 'I can't do that.' She said, 'oh, yes,' so I did. Then when our chairperson of our local, Bill Third, got elected to—he was elected to provincial executive of HEU [Hospital Employees' Union]. Then he applied for a job as a rep and he got it. Lois then became our chairperson, but she said she wouldn't do it unless I took over as secretary-treasurer. I said, 'I can't do it. It's too—.' She said, 'No. I'm not going to stand. Who's going to look after it?' I said, 'Okay, I'll do it.' So, there I was.

PW [00:11:22] That was of the local?

KV [00:11:24] At the local level. Of course, then I was more involved and then encouraging people to file grievances when there were definitely a situation where they should grieve.

PW [00:11:45] What actually led to you considering working at the HEU office?

KV [00:11:53] I think the big, you know, it was, we had the strike of '76, and it was very unfair how we were treated. We had no—I think we'd gone out once before. I can remember Mr. McCready being there. He was our previous secretary-business manager, and we were out there on the street. Some of us—and Lois was, she was really great at getting a group of us there. We were—that was our sort of first little demonstration. That was very short, but it ended very quickly. Then in 76, it lasted, I think, about three weeks. It started with the VGH [Vancouver General Hospital] and it was kind of a rolling one that they had and Lions Gate it was one of the last to go out. Lois actually took over because Bill Third was not available. He was ill. Lois took over and by that time I was head cashier, and we got the activation department, the old part of the hospital—so that's gone now. That was our strike headquarters. We had so many of our members come in and they said, 'I'm not going on the picket line. I'm not doing this. I'm not doing it.' Lois said, Kristina, can you take them into this other room while I get this organized?' She said, 'You've been doing scheduling and everything. See if you can schedule them for maybe going on picket duty or something.' They got into that room, and it was like, 'No way, we're not going.' I thought, 'Well, okay, that's fine. How about we'll list your names and what you want. I'll put categories. You can be a gopher— go for this, go for that. You can be on cleanup duty. You could be on making refreshments and that.' They were fine with that, but hardly any of them want to do picket duty. Anyway, at least they had some involvement, took some responsibility, but at night it got really bad. At that time, my partner, my deceased partner, he was working down in the shipyards at that time. He would come up at night. We were just like good friends at the time, but he would come up and he would walk the picket line at night because there were people driving by in cars and throwing bottles at—and it was women that were out. Almost—there was a few guys, but mainly women doing that. After, the first week or so, the guys started, the brothers started coming out because they like, 'What these women are getting—.' 'No, we're not.' We're going out and they didn't like having to be doing other duties where they felt that they could really be out where they should be. Really it stopped. We didn't have any more of these attempted assaults on our

women walking the picket lines. It's kind of scary. They tried to bring in some of the goods to stores and that and these picket lines went up because we were not affiliated at that time with other unions. Goods being brought in, there would be certain things, and we checked them, and then they would try and sneak stuff in that that they shouldn't be. We'd get a call and we'd all run over there and stand in front of these trucks. That was a little bit of excitement there. We held the line. It also, I think, it brought a lot of strength to our union, and especially to our local, and realizing we were being treated unfairly and we had to stand up. Actually it, we did, eventually we got a collective agreement out of it. There were a lot of things happening federally at that time with the cuts and everything too, and it spilled over here. The Social Credit government was just going to be—really take it out on health care workers and predominantly women, right? Yeah.

PW [00:17:11] So that's when you thought or did somebody from the head office—.

KV [00:17:15] Well no. Sharon Yandle came over and she—I could always remember—she would be on the picket line, and she would have, you know, she had one child with her in the stroller. We thought, 'Oh, this is really cool. We've got a woman here.' I think she inspired a lot of women just even being their support of being on the picket line. It gave us, I think, a better sense of women's involvement in our union. I think that was part of it, and then it was classification. Hans Brown was, he was really amazing on that. He had asked me to come over and do that. That was in the earlier part of the eighties to help on that. We went through a lot of the clerical classifications and so from Lions Gate. I was over there for, I guess, probably it was over a month. Then we also had then the Ed Peck—we went before and brought those. Part of my then follow-up was bringing the workers from HEU, the clerical workers who were getting reclassified, or their jobs were up for reclassification to get them to testify. Some of them were quite nervous about it. They were scared, but it went all well. I would just go there kind of and just sort of sit and then, go with them. I think that's all that was needed. Just a little bit of support. Right. Some of them got quite a large retroactive settlement once it was all settled, so that made a big difference. Not all got settled. It got then rolled into a collective agreement, but it was still, it still wasn't a fair, fair wages if you compared it to others in the private sector, etcetera, that were quite a difference.

PW [00:19:55] When you were doing that, were you actually being employed by head office HEU at that time?

KV [00:20:02] Well, no. You would go on leave.

PW [00:20:08] You had a hard time getting a leave.

KV [00:20:11] Yes, we did. Hans Brown, of course, he also managed, I think, when I was 24, I planned to take—I said, 'Well, I should get three weeks' vacation. I've been here five years now with our new collective agreement.' He said, 'No, you were hired in June, but you didn't start the first day of July.' Of course, Hans fought for that but that was lost. They did agree that I could make up the time [unclear] My mum and I went to Sweden for three weeks because I said, 'Well, if I don't get it, I'm leaving. I'm sorry. This is important.' And so, you know. He had—not every—you know, it was a test case. It wasn't successful but it actually, after that, and our manager having to be in his presence really backed off. Also, I think they knew that he had been a press secretary to Tommy Douglas. He had also—of course, 1972 was a provincial campaign manager for the NDP so he had a reputation. It really made a big difference. Then when I came, I was hired by HEU, I let them know that I wanted to go on leave again. Of course, they would bill HEU and HEU would pay them,

but it would be like a leave just as if I was a rep. I was going in to work in finance. They wouldn't give it to me because I was not going to work as a rep. I talked to Hans, and he said because he was our rep, he'd been our rep. He said, 'That's not—just no.' We're going to fight this.' We did and so I was the first support staff non rep to come from the industry.

PW [00:22:38] That's amazing. Then you proceeded to have quite a long stint in the provincial office.

KV [00:22:45] I did. I also, I talked to my friends at the local and I said, 'You know what? I think you need to go to the convention and discuss this because the people that they're hiring as support staff, almost all of them have a non-union background.' Yeah, I noticed when I came in there, they just didn't have that understanding or knowledge. I mean, they're all, you know, they were great. I said, 'I think we should be able to apply.' They changed the constitution and bylaws to reflect that which, you know, that was really great. Then I started at HEU and, of course, then I was encouraged to stand for the staff union executive because the clerical staff really had no representation. They would—I went to the meetings. I kind of looked around and how are they voting on issues. They would all either look at their reps or whisper to them, 'What should I do?' I thought this isn't this isn't right. They haven't got their own voice. That changed things quite a bit.

PW [00:24:09] What union was that?

KV [00:24:10] At the Hospital Employees' staff union.

PW [00:24:12] So it was [unclear].

KV [00:24:13] Yeah. Also, after a few more people coming in from industry that also helped—just—but I think it gave them a voice. Not that the reps would didn't, in any way, tried to force their views on them. It's just that they really didn't know.

PW [00:24:34] Yeah. You were a membership clerk and a payroll clerk and then you actually—were you the political action coordinator?

KV [00:24:46] Yes. I had done payroll after actually being a cashier at the hospital. My last job, I decided I want to do payroll because I thought—I'd finished all my business administration courses and that. I took all those that night. Took me forever, but a number of years. I thought I didn't want to also become management at the hospital. I just did not feel comfortable. I mean, I'd seen too many things and I thought, 'No, I don't belong there.' That's why I started thinking, 'I belong with HEU. I belong with my union.' Yeah.

PW [00:25:27] I was wondering if we could now move into a some of the events that occurred during your time there. First of all, can you remember being involved in Solidarity?

KV [00:25:43] Yes. Well, I hadn't been there that long at the time, but we—at HEU, we were very supportive. We did like support of picket lines and, of course, we did our donations to all the different areas that they had. They set up even their own food banks around the province. I think that must have been the first time that we actually in modern times had food banks and to help our struggling sisters and brothers, it was brutal what they did—it actually was. HEU was involved. We went on—there was demos downtown. There was a huge one. Then, of course, the Empire Stadium. Oh, my goodness. Of

course, when the bands marched and we're all standing up and we were just so excited and to see so many turn out. It was just a force to be reckoned with.

PW [00:27:01] I remember feeling that I was so disappointed because I worked as a nurse and, of course, it was hard to get a day off, right? I was scheduled to work then, so missed the whole event.

KV [00:27:12] Oh, yeah. It was one of those events that you'll always remember. Actually, it was great. The Lions Gate local came out. They were all—there was so many there. I think also it just—I think it engaged staff at HEU as well. We really felt so strong that it was such a great force to be reckoned with. At the end it was kind of (laughter) sort of, yeah, it was—when it was settled that was a little harsh.

PW [00:28:08] Actually, HEU had some really good years when the NDP was elected and good collective agreements. Then we have to enter the terrible era, which was started in 2001 when the Liberals were elected. Bill 29 enacted in 2001, 2002. That must've been one of the most difficult [unclear].

KV [00:28:46] It was [unclear] Yeah. Well, up till—now Carmela was not secretary-business manager any longer. When Carmela came in (Allevato), it was—she really changed things. It took a while but, I think being a female secretary-business manager for predominantly at that time, approximately 85 percent women union, it just, it had a different, like the gender lens and I think it made—it really changed HEU. It helped us grow a lot. Then also we had people such as Geoff Meggs, in our communications department. Chris Gainor was great. Then after, and Geoff was, it was wonderful because I came as political action coordinator. First, I came under Carmela Allevato, but then she said, 'Would you like to go and work in communications under Geoff Meggs.' I said, 'Oh, I'd love to.' Totally brilliant. It was just—and just lovely to work with. The other thing that Carmela did was to bring your children. We had events before we could not bring children. It was just like, no way. Carmela, if there's anything like summer school, staff would come, I could bring my son Erik along as a child. Totally welcome—not to the classes, but to different events. She would host (and Jim her husband) at their summer place. All staff bring your family, bring your kids. Right. It became an environment that became much more inclusive. If there was a concern, and that you needed extra time or whatever, she was very supportive. Mary Laplante was too. It really, I think, it made for—it was a very good workplace.

PW [00:31:24] Yeah, then we move into Bill 29, which was the first blow in 2002.

KV [00:31:30] Oh yes.

PW [00:31:32] I can't imagine how devastating that was especially when the promise was, 'oh no, we won't touch your collective agreement' and then that collective agreement was just basically ripped up.

KV [00:31:52] Yeah, it was.

PW [00:31:53] Yeah.

KV [00:31:54] It was. It was very tragic. It was traumatic for so many. It was over 8,000 and mainly women. A lot of them were single parents.

PW [00:32:07] In terms of the contracting out, you mean?

KV [00:32:11] Yes. Being fired.

PW [00:32:13] Basically, [unclear].

KV [00:32:15] Yes. You could get rehired, but for a much lower wage. You didn't have your vacations, your sick time, it was just devastating. It was so devastating. The loss of membership. I really believe that the reason that they went after HEU first—I think they would have continued if they didn't get so much resistance. We were very politically active, and they saw us as a force. We were very supportive of the NDP. We did—a lot of our members had at that time become NDP supporters and quite a few had become members. I think they felt that was a threat and which was unfortunate. They really chose to go after HEU, but there was great support from other unions. With the contracting out of cleaners and that, we did, like we had wonderful researchers who looked at Scotland, what happened in Scotland when they contracted out the cleaners. Well, what happened was all sorts of—you know, as a nurse, the diseases that—I can remember at Lions Gate, before housekeeping, the workers, some of them had been there since practically out of school. They knew their jobs. They were so efficient—

PW [00:34:16] The hospitals were spotless [unclear].

KV [00:34:17] Absolutely.

PW [00:34:18] It was really shocking to see the impact of contracting out. It was just horrendous.

KV [00:34:27] Yes. Then the people that—some of them that came in, they had no experience, and they would be walking around with these carts. Somebody would be throwing up, or there will be blood somewhere. The nurses would be calling. 'Well, we can't do that. You have to go through another number to get somebody to come and clean it up.' [unclear]

PW [00:34:50] Yeah, because basically—just to explain that—the nurses had to call a call centre. They couldn't say to a cleaner that was like five feet away from them, 'Can you clean that up now?' No, they had to call a call centre to get somebody to then tell the cleaner to clean. No, it was absolutely ludicrous. It was, it certainly—those decisions were made by people who had no idea how a hospital runs.

KV [00:35:21] No. The damage that it did with contagious diseases, it was outrageous. Absolutely outrageous. Did they save any money on it? No. The money went elsewhere. Instead of being here with people that live and work in the province, it went out of province. Yeah.

PW [00:35:51] Basically, Bill 29 was in 2004, but that was the coup de grace. The worst actually was Bill 37 into—and I was just thinking, tomorrow is the anniversary of that April 28th in 2004. That the next attack, big attack happened. I don't know what you remember about what it was like on top of Bill 29 [unclear] Bill 37.

KV [00:36:23] It just continued. I think the saving grace was HEU was part of CUPE. We were brought back into the family in the eighties, and we had CUPE behind us and the labour movement and the B.C. Fed [B.C. Federation of Labour]. I was on the B.C. Fed

political action committee, representing HEU. They were very supportive. Then, of course, it would—it's just not us it would be affecting. It would be affecting other unions. We had to get the legal teams going. It just ended up, you know, took many years, but it ended up to the Supreme Court of Canada to just shoot that down. (laughter) Yeah.

PW [00:37:27] Yeah. I think that was 2007. It's interesting because in Bill 37, because of the support you had, there wasn't—I mean, there was a massive wage rollback and a continuation of the privatization, but there was a memorandum that was, that HEU negotiated, which mitigated some of that and it was probably as a result of all the support that you had because I think that then there was a cap on. It was still awful because there was still privatization, but that memorandum established a cap on how many people could be privatized.

KV [00:38:13] Yes.

PW [00:38:13] But the problem, such a big problem, was the lack of successorship, right? That only now has been addressed just recently. A company wouldn't be in residential care, a company would come in, they could sell it, and it was start—and then HEU had to organize it all over again.

KV [00:38:34] I went through it with—my late husband had Huntington's disease, so the care facility in Surrey that was best able to care for patients with Huntington's disease. When he was first admitted, it really worked quite well. They then basically fired those—brought in a new contractor and so the great staff were gone. They would just hire—and some of them just didn't have the knowledge. Then also it was the patient and the caregiver, a patient ratio too. It was so low. For about seven years, my son and I worked—well, not in the beginning. We didn't have to go every night, but the last few years it was every night, or else aspiration pneumonia. We had to do the suctioning. We had to do the mouth care. We had to or else he would end up again back in ICU. It was—and there was nowhere else that he could be moved to. Closer to home, he would have to be sharing a room, which would not have worked for someone in his situation. It was very difficult. Extremely difficult.

PW [00:40:20] Yeah. We'll get back to your activism around that later on. I wanted to let you reflect back on your career HEU. What were some of the most memorable moments?

KV [00:40:37] Oh, gosh. Well, at HEU I enjoyed with the members—I loved that. In the political action committee, we even had a summer school, a week of political action. I remember we got Tom Perry to come out, and he was great, and encouraged a lot of our members to motivate them, and some even to run for office. I think that was kind of my calling. Right? Even bringing over members to Victoria here. Come and meet your MLA. Come into question period. This is question period. This is what goes on. Take this back to your members and share with them. We had a little newsletter that we published a few times regarding what we had been up to, to send out to the different locals and other, I think, the municipal campaigns. They were great because we learned a lot from CUPE, and our political action committee even met with some of the CUPE political action members and the chair, of course, who is now president of CUPE [unclear] (laughter). Yeah. We would—I would follow up with the Labour Councils and I would get—I loved reading their minutes from every month. Okay, what's happened? What's happened here, what's happened there? Okay, who, who have they interviewed and support? Who are the municipal politicians that will be respectful to union members? We would do that and then we would advise our members: in your area, here are those running for municipal politics

that have been endorsed by Labour Council. CUPE—some were just CUPE, or some might be just HEU, but we would then give that information to our members so they could at least have some idea of the background of those running. I think that was very important because I think the programs and the services offered by municipalities are really vital to the whole community. That I enjoyed. Also, I think serving on the [unclear Chrising] Coalition for Central America. That was interesting. I can remember we'd meet and one time we went to see the Korean Consulate because of how there was a lot of Korean, South Korean investments and in Central America. They would set up these maquiladoras and the women would be locked in at night, but that wasn't the worst of it. What really got me was the bathroom breaks because they had very few bathrooms and they were—it was just for them even to get a bathroom break. Some of these women got so ill because they would get UTIs (urinary tract infections). They would really suffer. It was it was horrific. To bring that to the consulate and to be able to look the consulate straight in his face and say, 'Do you know what's happening to these women because they're not allowed to go to the bathroom?' I think it was very embarrassing for him, but I think these things need to be brought up. They were very strong women that were involved with this kind of work. Also, I just, I can remember saying, 'Look at these clothes. Do they have the blood, tears and sweat of the women in the maquiladoras? Do they have that on it?' We really tried at HEU, for the staff, for our clothes that we got, it was—we could go to, you know, like there were places and they were made union by unionized workers here. We did try and do that. It's very difficult but I think we really need to also be conscious of where our clothes and other goods made and how were the people treated.

PW [00:45:52] This fits right into your work. Could you talk a little bit about the your work with the Women's Rights Committee?

KV [00:45:59] Oh, yes.

PW [00:46:00] At the Fed?

KV [00:46:01] Yes. Yeah. Well, at the Fed, it was a political action committee. Yeah.

PW [00:46:06] The women's right?

KV [00:46:07] That was NDP. In 1996, I had been on the committee previously for a few years, but then I ran for chair. It was very interesting because we were government. HEU was very supportive because it did mean sometimes I might have to take some time off. Also, I bet that at times I would say, 'Well, we're having quarterly meetings. Can I use HEU for the Saturday and Sunday?' We'll have that. We'd always have the Minister of Women's Equality come and speak to us. At first it was Penny Priddy, and she was absolutely marvelous. Then Sue Hammell, and she really got so much done for us. Then Jenny Quan was our last minister. It was interesting because after Glen Clark was elected, I was actually released to work. I got released so I could work on his campaign to become leader because I'd been so impressed with him. I didn't really know him very well. We had to have—I would go with members if they would have to see their MLA or that. In that case, we went to Sunny Hill and to talk to the administrator. Glen Clark came, and he walked around. He knew the executive. He was very hands on, very caring, because we were really worried, because we thought there was the talk about it being amalgamated with children's. It has specific needs. I mean, those children—

PW [00:48:01] For people who don't know. Could you just explain the Sunny Hill?

KV [00:48:04] It was more like a long term care place for children with greater needs, medical needs. Glen was so involved, and he just knew so much about it. He had been there and dealt so much because it was in his riding. He said, 'Look.' He was, I guess, he was minister of finance at the time, I think. He had said, 'Look, as long as I'm in Cabinet, I will do whatever it takes. This will not be shut down.' He was just so committed. When he ran for leader, I thought this is the person I want as leader. Very strong, very committed, and so I was very pleased. After when he was making the Cabinet, I got, I [unclear] lunchtime walk, and I got this call on my cell phone and it said, and it was Glen Clark wants, 'Premier Glen Clark wants to speak to you, but you have to get to a landline.' I thought, 'Oh my goodness, what's—okay.' He's calling and saying, 'Well,' he said, 'I am appointing the minister of Women's Equality. Is there anyone the Women's Rights Committee would not be happy with?' Anyway, so we had this little discussion. Then, of course, he made his appointment based on that. Yeah, so that's something that the Women's Rights Committee, that they wanted input into, who the minister should be, so it was really great. We had that support right from the Premier. Then, of course, women's issues were—we brought in and I think Penny as well the gender lens. Right? That was that was very important. We had a magazine that we published as well that went out. All Labour Councils got our "Priorities" magazine. It went to the universities, and I was just looking over at one of my reports and I would do a report. It was a report to the whole convention. This report, it was like women in municipal politics, 'Last fall, in conjunction with our September steering committee meeting, the WRC [Women's Rights Committee] held a workshop for women interested in running as candidate or assisting candidates in the November civic election.' Jennie Kwan was there (she being a Vancouver City councillor previously.) Iris Reamsbottom was one of our HEU members who was a school trustee. They shared that we had a handbook, "NDP Women in Municipal Politics." We really wanted to make sure that we assisted women and pay equity, of course. We had a step forward in to equality, but we needed more. We had a resolution going on to the floor and like 'okay women, we got to get out there and make sure our resolution gets passed.' We we did a leadership candidate service, survey, I should say, and a lot work out towards anti-violence. B.C. benefits—'We were delighted that the earnings exemption under B.C. Benefits has been restored to the pre 1996 level, a step that we have continued to lobby for. We really— and also, we would have on the convention floor one and a half hour women's caucus. Every woman member, female member of the party was a member of the Women's Rights Committee. We did that. Then monthly, we had our meetings from—we used to use the provincial office of the party. Also, for some of our steering committee, we would have some of them at BCGEU [British Columbia General Employees' Union]. Also a few at the Machinists Union and down in Richmond. We felt that it was—but mainly it was HEU. It was very convenient for me too because it was two days. To have that ability to bring women in from different and their responsibility was where they were, what their region, they then had to report out, and then every month, report in what had happened on a telephone conference and then in person for two days every quarter. I think it made a big difference. We had a big, I think, it really influenced the New Democratic Party as well.

PW [00:54:08] So, Kristina, you did retire, but that certainly wasn't the end of your activism, and you were in a very unique position. One of the few people that I know who has taken forward two resolutions that actually were successful and ended up in changing law. I wonder if we could—maybe if you want to talk about the genetic discrimination.

KV [00:54:38] Yes. Well, so my late husband had Huntington's disease, and unbeknown to us, it was in the family. His father had been misdiagnosed, and so we thought it was Parkinson's. We didn't realize until much later when they could do the genetic testing,

because he didn't really have kind of the usual symptoms so that really it—. I took a great interest. I got involved with the Huntington's Society and learned as much as I could. My son too, we would attend different conferences. In 2009 there was a symposium at St Paul's Hospital that we attended. At that time, it was still unionized at the care home. We even invited one of the caregivers to come along and to learn more. Actually, at that time, they had brought up—and we knew that it was difficult getting insurance—they brought that up that we—it really is very difficult.

PW [00:56:16] [unclear] he had a genetic based illness.

KV [00:56:18] Yes. Anyway, I took that back, which was interesting that very same afternoon. Later on, we had a Resolutions Committee meeting for North Vancouver federal, and I'd been on that executive since, oh, in the late eighties sometime. I said, 'If I draft up something, can we submit it?' They said, 'Yes, absolutely.' We voted on it, and that it could be amended after—I just wanted a little bit more information from the CEO of Huntington's Canada. I drafted up a resolution and it went to convention in Halifax, the August 2009, and it came in at the very end. It didn't have much—it didn't really have any traction. After that, I went, I thought well, because with my work at HEU like Svend Robinson, we worked, we would always call him if there was anything in Ottawa. It would be Bill Siksay that would answer, and he was so helpful always. I thought, 'well he's an MP now,' because Svend had stepped down. I went to see him, and we had a nice visit, but he said, 'I'm sorry, Kristina. I'm really busy. I've got some other private member's bills and that.' He said, 'I'm going to talk to Judy Wasylycia-Leis because she's the critic in that area. I think she's going to help you more and I'm really—.' He had a lot of bills that he was working on. I got a call just a couple of weeks after. She let me know that they would be working on something. She did bring up, I guess, October '09, she brought out a motion in parliament on that. It was raised in parliament at the time, and it then went to, in 2009, to the B.C. NDP convention, and I decided I better appeal it because I was worried it wasn't going to make it. I'm glad I did because we did get it moved up. Margaret Birrell, I asked her, 'Would you speak on it?' She said, 'Absolutely.' I spoke on it, and it was passed unanimously. It basically just says—well, for the federal one—it says, 'Whereas many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom in European Union, have taken steps to limit genetic discrimination, be it resolved that the New Democratic Party of Canada calls on the federal government to implement anti genetic discrimination protection and establish a standing body to enforce protections, document genetic discrimination cases, and assess effectiveness of enacted protections. And be it further resolved, the New Democratic Party Canada calls on the federal government to also devise a public communications education campaign to promote anti genetic discrimination fears and aid uptake of genetic testing a research among Canadians.' Now this has been signed on by—it's just not Huntington's Society—Canadian Cystic Fibrosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Parkinson's Society, Spinal Bifida, Hydrocephalus Association of Canada, Ovarian Cancer Association, ALS Society of Canada, Alzheimer's Society of Canada, Osteoporosis of Canada, Kidney Foundation of Canada, Tourette Syndrome Foundation, plus others. There was, at that time, there was approximately 2,000 different types of diseases that could be tested genetically. What that meant was you had to disclose if there was any one if you or if anyone your immediate family had a genetic disease. Unless you could prove that you didn't have it, you did not get your insurance. Therefore, or also, there were certain employments. This was also a worker's right. It affected the Canadian Labour Code. It did, first of all, and then in February of 2010. Then, at that time, it was New Democratic health critic, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, Winnipeg North introduced a bill in parliament 'to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of personal genetic characteristics.' Also, she said, 'Unless genetic tests results are protected, there is a real

danger that Canadians will just refuse to be tested, putting their health at risk.' That's another very serious concern. There was a Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness that was very involved with this. Then after, I think it was June 14th, 2010, and this is motion passed, at CUPE Local 873 Provincial Executive Board meeting. I took this to my friend Steve Stringfellow, a paramedic that I knew well. I said, 'Steve, can you take this to your executive board?' He said, 'Absolutely.' They passed: 'Be it resolved, CUPE Local 873 as a provincial body related to health care, publicly support the initiatives of the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness to ensure that all provincial human rights legislations, including anti genetic discrimination protection.' That very same day in the House of Commons, which is interesting, Bill Siksay (and then he was MP for Burnaby Douglas, and he was retiring shortly after) moved to introduce a Bill C-536, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act anti and genetic characteristics. He actually even mentioned me, 'The issue was brought to my attention by Kristina Vandervoort, North Vancouver and supported by the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness whose members include'—he listed all the different societies that were involved. Then it was, it moved along. Then the Senate got involved—Senator Cowan—and brought it forward because they had some interest in there because—and I think Senator Cowan, in particular, had an interest in it because there was a previous board or a MP that (and he had been Speaker of the House) that had succumbed to Huntington's. It's brought back and so, but it was the chief executive officer of Huntington's. She wrote to me, just a clarification that the Minister of Justice indicated that she would ask Cabinet to refer Bill S-201 to the Supreme Court. She also indicated that she would let it go through the parliament process first: 'Let it go through the parliament process first, so it has not been referred yet and we hope that it won't.' I was seeing—he's now Cabinet Minister Wilkinson, MP in Vancouver. I went to visit him a couple of times. 'Let him know that the Huntington's Society started the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness in 2008 and 20 different organizations.' Here it was, the minister she had—of justice—she had already planned how she was going to do it. Anyway, it did go forward. I was on the executive of the B.C. Council of federal riding, and I had been involved for quite some time. At that time I was co-chair of it. That meant that I would attend the council meetings in Ottawa. On Saturday, March 11th, 2017, we were sitting there, and Tom Mulcair comes in—he would always attend it. He was very pleased because the bill had passed and the Liberal backbenchers, they'd been told, Cabinet, they'd been instructed, 'Do not vote for this.' The Cabinet, I guess they were afraid they'd get kicked out of Cabinet if they didn't listen. My MP, he had been lobbied, and actually, last time I was to lobby, he said to me, 'We've just had a number from the Jewish community here because there is a hereditary disease.' This lobbying does work. Yes, it was just not me again and it wasn't me bringing somebody from back east to come and see him along with me or my son and I. The Jewish community was very concerned. I was very pleased he voted for it. It was in the National Post over the—just days before published, 'Over the objection of their own government, dozens of Liberal backbenchers voted Wednesday night in favour of a bill banning genetic discrimination and voting for what is known as Bill S-21. The back bench Liberals, along with conservatives, NDP and Green Party MP, made it a crime for, among others, insurance companies to demand potential customers provide a DNA test in order to get a policy. Additionally, no company will be able to deny someone a job if they fail to have their genes tested. There we go.

PW [01:08:39] [unclear] story, but it didn't end there.

KV [01:08:42] No, it did not. What do we have to do after that? Well, we know that they then listen to insurance companies, which brought forward action and to the Supreme Court in Quebec and—

PW [01:09:08] Quebec decided that it was unconstitutional.

KV [01:09:11] December 2018 gave the opinion that they said the act does not constitute a valid exercise of parliament's criminal law. The Quebec opinion did not overturn the act but did put the act at risk in response to the opinion of the Quebec Court of Appeal. The Canadian Council for Genetic Fairness filed a notice of appeal, referring the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. It took—the hearing took place October 10th, 2019, and the long awaited decision was extremely reassuring—illustrates that Supreme Court of Canada recognized the necessity for the pan candidate protection of genetic test information by supporting the act. Yes, it's paramount. This protection to many people, paramount to their health and well-being. The fear discrimination leads to individuals not having genetic tests or making informed decision which may not be in their best interests.

PW [01:10:34] You must have felt that's amazing.

KV [01:10:36] Yes. My son, he started work as an electrician and here his company comes and says, 'Do you want to take insurance?' He says, 'Mum, I can't.' He said, 'I haven't been tested yet. He said, 'I'm not'. I said, 'No, you can't. So, no.' It meant a lot of people—and what it did also was there you get this—if you're unfortunate enough to have it, then you don't have any long term care. You don't have any life insurance because you are going to pass away earlier than normal. You don't have that financial support that you would have. It means that it really affects the whole family. Where they cannot, and it's difficult to get caregivers, and often you have to pay yourself. So what do you do? You leave your ill loved one at home, and then they may fall or all sorts of things can happen. It's devastating. It really it is. Also, I think it brings to attention—I can remember Gordon going to one of the places because he was a musician-singer, and he went to, we want to watch a band that he knew of. He went there, and at the door he was actually assaulted. He was pushed down, and he said, 'You're drunk, you're drunk.' He fell and he hurt himself. I called and I said, 'Do you discriminate against people with disabilities?' He says, 'Of course not.' I talked to the owner, and I said, Well, this is what happened.' I said, 'You know what? At one time he played there. You have to be really careful, and also, whether a person is inebriated or not, you cannot assault them.' And he was assaulted. At one time, Erik and I had just seen Gordon and we had just had dinner, and he pulled away in his car. We went off and then he calls the next morning, and I said, 'What's happened?' He said, 'I've been arrested.' I said, 'What?' He said, Well, for drunk driving. I said, 'What?' He said, Well, now—. Anyway, they decided that he wasn't inebriated, and he explained to them. They did get him his car back. He said, 'I'm being followed. I know I'm being watched. I've been pulled over so many times.' I said, 'Gordon,' I said, 'you need to get now something from Huntington's Society and show them. Once he did that, then the RCMP didn't pull him over again. Going on to this, but there are these concerns. The other concern is when they bring in someone that they have a problem with, and the police is called. That happened to Gordon. Just before he went into hospital, he wanted to live closer to this other area. He lived and he needed requirements, so he lived in this home, and it was run by a nurse. One day, she had to call because he was upset and she said, 'You shouldn't be going out because you need to have your surgery on your eyes, and you can't see.' He was upset. She called the police, and the police, the RCMP, came and they arrested him. What they said for him to get down because I guess his arms were going—it's Huntington's you have the [unclear] and then it really gets going. They told him to get down. Well, he couldn't get down, so they tasered him. Then he was told again to do that. Tasered again. Get the phone call. He's being rushed to Surrey Hospital, and he's on a heart monitor for a day. The good thing was we did then get him into long term care, a facility. Right. Well, as soon as the hospital could find a place; it took a couple of weeks.

By that time, they had his medications adjusted and everything. I did call in and I spoke to the RCMP, and friends were saying, 'You should go public about this.' I said, 'No, I don't think so.' My son had done the RCMP Youth Academy in North Van, and they were really good to him. They were great. We decided no, we wanted to talk to them about it, and we wanted to talk to the team at the care home, so they were aware of it, and to the Huntington's Society, and to politicians as well. Really what they needed to do is to have a nurse when they come to do those arrests where there's somebody who has a medical condition bring—because at that point it would have been easy for a nurse to say, 'Look, I understand you've got that. Here, let's just talk. You need to—your medications just need to be checked and that.' They had these young officers. One of them sent in on their own. Well, he might have come from somebody that just pulled a knife on him and he just didn't know. No information. So, I mean—

PW [01:16:54] Very [unclear] that that is obviously in the news all the kinds of incidents like that. I just have to say congratulations. That was an amazing achievement to start off the process that ended up, and I know it takes forever. At least the Supreme Court ruled, and then they have to change all the all the laws, etcetera. That was a fabulous achievement.

KV [01:17:23] There's still more work to be done because of the provincial laws, and it can be. Now, there's two professors that they have a—they're working on a—they have a mandate to review it and to bring—how to find out how to bring more up public involvement and bringing changes to law. They are, they're investigating how this case came about because it is in Canadian history, very precedent setting.

PW [01:18:09] Yes, absolutely. When you think about it, there's so many like genetic testing, it's become so prevalent, that it's so important to have that.

KV [01:18:20] It is. It really is. There is more because apparently there are some situations where it could still be problematic and insurance carriers can get around it. It hasn't been a case yet that's been brought before court, but it could happen. Yeah, so there's a little bit—there's a bit more work to be done.

PW [01:18:46] Yes. I think we're coming close to the end but I wanted to get your thoughts. What advice would you give to young working people these days regarding unions.

KV [01:19:04] Regarding unions?

PW [01:19:06] Yes.

KV [01:19:06] I would say, if you can, join a union, and if you're in a workplace that's not unionized, try to see if it can be or try and get it organized. I think, if you are fortunate enough to work in a unionized setting, do attend your meetings, find out. Also, there's a lot of programs available through your unions, a lot of workshops. If it was not for my union, I would not have been able to do any of my political work, or even stand up to, just stand my grounds for the times where Gordon had to be into ICU because they said there wasn't, there was no way he was going to survive. I stood my ground. One time, the first time was Adrian Dix we bumped into at Surrey Hospital. We told him, my son told him, what we had gone through to try to get him there. I just stood my ground and they had him in ICU immediately. They said, no, he's in a coma. You'll never—da-dut-da-da—he'll never wake up. This is your problem. You caused it here. You've got to see if there's any way we can save his life.' He just said, and Erik said that he'd been taken away for an hour, and to try

and get him to saying, well, your mother is doing all this and it's not right. Adrian said, 'Look, do take your time. This is a very important decision. If anything like this happens, or if you need to talk to me, here's my number. You talk to me. Take your time.' It did happen again. He had just been moved out of ICU and there was another procedure and that failed. They said, 'No way.' He was back in a coma. I said to my son and we had the doctor in charge of ICU call. She said, 'Well, there's absolutely—.' I said, 'Well, isn't there some—? Well, there was—so she kind of like—I said, 'Well, let's do that, because Gordon wants to live. He's got a very strong will to live.' Erik, like I had said to him, I said to him, 'Well, what did Adrian say?' He said, 'Just, take your time. Think about it.' He said, 'yes, absolutely do it,' and he did. He learned to walk again, and it gave him an extra five years of life, right. It was the right decision. Who would not feel intimidated by that process? These are the experts, but sometimes we know our loved ones and, you know, how strong they are and their will to live in cases such as that. Not in all cases. It did make a difference. You can be a strong voice, and that's something that we learn as activists in the trade union movement. Also, that taught me to be a stronger voice politically as well. I would say to our members at HEU I said, 'You've been involved in a union. You know what? You're used to meetings. You know the rules of order. You are, you know, you're very capable to be involved if you choose to join an executive of a political party or if you decide to run for office. You had that. There's so much education available too through your union. I think it's really important. Also, at that point, there are mentors within the union movement, many mentors, and they will be there to assist you. I had my mentor. It was Lois Reimer at Lions Gate Hospital, and her husband was president of one of the railway unions. He was also president of North Vancouver Lonsdale in 1972 when Colin Gablemann won. It was a big influence on me, and I learnt a lot. So join. It's really important to get active.

PW [01:24:05] Sure. Anything that you wanted to add?

KV [01:24:09] Oh, there was one thing I wanted to add. Yeah. I was on a couple of boards. The first one was Board of Examiners for Podiatry, and these are order-in-council boards. Then it was Capilano College, and then it was the Appeal Board for Health Care and MSP [Medical Services Plan]. After the Liberals got elected, and we had Daniel Jarvis as our MP in North Vancouver, he decided to fire me off the board, or well, the Liberals did, right. I thought—I didn't think this was right. I called up Ed Lavalle, who had been one of my poli sci professors, and then he was then working at NDP Provincial Office. I explained to Ed, and he said, 'What do you want to do?' I said, 'Well, I want to go up—I want to call the North Shore News. I want to have them come and take a picture of me standing outside Cap College and saying, 'I've been fired from the board.' He said, 'oh, yeah', but I said, 'I'm kind of nervous. What legal ramification would I have?' Of course, Ed being a lawyer, he was just so absolutely brilliant and lovely. He said, 'No, Kristina, you'll be fine.' He said, 'any questions or anything, just call me,' so of course I did this. The North Shore News they said, 'Sit on the sidewalk.' So, I did. They took a photo. Next week, Sunday, every door on the North Shore, they used to say, well they had my picture on the front page, 'Fired from Capilano College Board.' Then later that week, Daniel Jarvis has, you know, he's interviewed, and he said, 'Miss Vandervoort's not the appropriate type of person that we want on the board.' So, there I am phoning Ed, and he's saying—I said, 'I think I should contact them. I think that he owes me apology.' He said, 'Yes, he does'. Anyway, I did contact them and I said that I felt I'd been maligned by our MLA and he should apologise to me. Next issue, an apology from Daniel Jarvis. I thought, nothing more I can do about it, but they did leave me to finish my term on the Appeal Board for Health Care or Medical Services.

PW [01:27:13] I think the message is don't mess with Kristina Vandervoort.

KV [01:27:17] I think this is our union background and also—yeah—and also, we do have our mentors or people that we know that we can go and ask questions. We're very fortunate in that respect.