

Interview: Patricia Wejr (PW)

Interviewer: Donna Sacuta (DS)

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Transcription: Pam Moodie and Donna Sacuta

DS [00:00:05] So, Patricia, can you start off by telling us a bit about your family background, about where you were born, where you grew up, and maybe reflect a bit on some of the influences that your family may have had on your future as an activist?

PW [00:00:25] I was born in Vernon Jubilee Hospital, but I never lived in Vernon. My family lived on a farm in Trinity Valley, which is just outside of Enderby, B.C. I lived there for the first two years of my life until 1955, when my family moved to North Van (North Vancouver). My mother was born and raised in Vancouver, and I think basically there was an opportunity to move to North Van and that's what we did. Pretty uneventful childhood, I have to say, and in terms of union influences in the family, there wasn't a strong trade union background, but my dad did actually go to union meetings. He had started off working as a labourer in North Van, and then he was hired by the Vancouver Parks Board and he was a member of CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees). So I do recall him going to union meetings and then he was in the Foreman's Association.

PW [00:01:31] So, and my mother was a nurse, and of course in those days there wasn't a Nurses' Union at all. And she didn't work, she never worked full time. She worked mostly casual, nearly all of her career. From time to time, I think she worked a bit more, but mostly casual. I'll tell you an interesting story, though, because North Van was a very working-class neighbourhood. I went to Ridgeway Elementary and I believe it was grade one, I had this tiny little elderly teacher who said to the class, "Not if you go to university," she said, "When you go to university." That's always stuck with me because it was quite rare at the time. So I went through the school system. I graduated from Argyle and I went to Simon Fraser University. It's interesting because, even at the time, I selected Simon Fraser because it had quite a reputation for a more rad—it started off being quite radical, no longer the case, but it was at the time and there were a lot of, it was interesting because there were a lot of draft dodgers that were there from the US and some of my friends, this led me to understand about how wonderful it is to have a public health care system because some of my friends from the US had, were still paying. They were young, my age, and they were paying huge debts off because of like having an accident or something. So Simon Fraser was an interesting opportunity. When I first started, though, I didn't know what I really wanted to do. I was a bit of a rebel and I thought, even though I appreciated and really liked caring for people, I just couldn't stomach the thought of doing the same thing as my mother. So I went a term and I thought, "What am I doing here? I don't know. I'm direction, I don't have a direction." So I took a term off and I worked in the purchasing department at SFU and that's when I decided "Oh, I better go back and get my—"

DS [00:03:44] Get a real job.

PW [00:03:44] Yeah, get a degree. So, at the time they were just starting the Communications Department. The first year I was there, there was no Communications Department. So I just thought, "Well, this sounds quite interesting." So I became part of the Communications Department. But also at the time I took, I think it was a Western Canada history class and the professor wanted us, even though it was undergrad, wanted us to do

some original research. And I'm not sure why I was attracted to the history of the coal mines on Vancouver Island. Maybe it was because my grandfather on my father's side had been a coal miner. His family was from Czechoslovakia and they had also worked in the mines there. But anyway, I was intrigued and I went to Victoria. I did a lot of research in the archives and became really outraged reading about the treatment of the miners, about Dunsmuir abusing miners. The health and safety was dreadful, and also the absolutely appalling statistics on the number of Asian, Chinese workers who died. In the archives you could just see lists, long lists of people who died in the mines. So I was, I think I got hooked at that point. I loved doing the research, but also I was totally engrossed in the history, the labour history of the mines in B.C. And then I was in my last year at SFU, and you had to do a co-op placement. So I did a co-op placement at Co-op Radio, and that's, originally, I didn't work on a labour program there. As a budding feminist, I worked on a program called Women Unlimited. Then I met Howie Smith, who was also a volunteer there and Howie and I started a program called Union Made, which is still, it's M-A-D-E, which is still being broadcast today, I believe. So that's, I think it's one of the longest running shows on Co-op Radio. So that was really interesting because I was then immersed in the trade union movement in the Vancouver area because we had, and B.C., we had to interview people on a regular basis.

PW [00:06:28] And another thing that we did, which I think with hindsight was probably the most boring radio ever, and I don't know if anybody listened, but we used to record the Vancouver and District Labour Council meetings, and at the time Syd Thompson was the President, larger than life. Of course he was from the Carpenters Union and he chaired those meetings like you wouldn't believe. If you, if a motion was up, you had to run, literally run to the mic to say if you wanted to speak to it, because it would be passed before you could make it to the mic. I remember Marion Pollack being at those meetings, too. So, at the time, I was totally hooked working at Co-op Radio, but there were no salaries. You didn't apply for jobs there. You had to actually rely on grants and basically cobble together an income. I had been quite, I was quite quiet until my time at Co-op Radio and when some of the older people who were part of the first to establish the radio station decided that I should be the Chair of the Workers' Council. So that kind of cured me of any shyness and that's when I started understanding that I could use my voice and I had to, to chair those meetings.

DS [00:08:01] What sort of issues were debated there?

PW [00:08:05] Oh, it was all sorts of things about programming. One was interesting, was whether or not we should actually be part of a union since we, that was a debate that went on for a long time. There were also, there were funny issues about some of the programs that were going on and some of them that were in other languages. We found out sometimes that probably we weren't really in support of what was being said all the time. But it was interesting. In order to actually have some kind of an income, Howie and I thought, well, there's probably something more we can do. We didn't get paid for doing the program, obviously, because it was volunteer, but we started, Howie started this I don't know if it was ever officially a company, I think so. It was called Overtime, B.C. Overtime, Overtime Productions. And we thought that we should be able to do some work for unions and do some more work on labour history. So we did get some contracts. We did some work for the Carpenters Union, oral history for them, Howie did a lot of fantastic interviews, oral history interviews with trade unionists all over the province. I did some, but he did most of them and we also did a few -- in those days, of course, video didn't exist and we did slide-tape presentations. We did a couple for the BCTF. One was called "These Were the Reasons", which Howie then later turned into a video and also one called "Strike". So it

was basically materials for teachers to use if they wanted to talk about labour history. Sound familiar? That's the same thing you're doing now. So we did that and then we actually got a Canada Council grant to do a play about Ginger Goodwin. My job was to do all the research. A guy named Norbert Rubesaat, he was the writer, and then Howie was producer, I guess. I don't know. Anyway, so I did a huge amount of research about Ginger Goodwin, back over to the archives and I got so into it. I spent a lot of time in, not only his work on the Island, but in Trail, and then got hooked on the Western Federation of Miners, and I was this close to thinking, "I have to go to Yorkshire, I have to find out about his history." But of course we didn't have the money to do such a thing.

DS [00:11:04] So was this all before any books have been written about Ginger Goodwin?

PW [00:11:09] Yes, yeah, I know. People said to me at the time, "Why didn't you write a book?" I mean, I just, I just didn't. But it was extremely interesting, because again it was original research and I had to go to the archives and spent a lot of time there. Also one of the interesting things we did, Howie had, as I said, Howie had done so many interviews and I had done some and Derek Reimer, who was the head of the archives at the time and did the Sound Heritage series, he asked me if I would be a guest editor on a Sound Heritage magazine, which we called Fighting for Labour, and that was very interesting. So again, those tapes, I can still hear. Like this was a long time ago. I think that was 1978. I can still hear the voices of the people that we interviewed for that.

DS [00:12:11] So these were the tapes we now call them the Howie Smith Collection at the Royal B.C. Museum.

PW [00:12:18] Yes.

DS [00:12:18] And that's what you worked on?

PW [00:12:20] Yes.

DS [00:12:20] And how did you locate the people that you chose to interview?

PW [00:12:25] It was just, it was basically just word of mouth. I mean, Howie had quite a few connections in the trade union movement and in the political movement. So it was basically word of mouth. I know that when, some of the ones that I did it was part of the Carpenters. And so the head of the Carpenters at the time here would say, "Oh, why don't you try this guy and why don't you try that guy?" And I went over to the Nanaimo and I interviewed a few people over there. So it was really like that. It was just, okay, get in touch with the head office, ask them if they know anybody and who they think should be interviewed and Howie would just head off to a community like when he went to Trail and he talked to some of the union offices there and they'd say, "Well, you should talk to this person." And so it was really just the word of mouth, because, of course, in those days nobody had any of the, nobody had a website or anything like that.

DS [00:13:24] But that collection that you participated in, it's still bearing fruit for the work that you're doing now through the Labour Heritage Centre with the podcast.

PW [00:13:34] Yeah.

DS [00:13:36] I know we've done some episodes where you remembered interviews that were done with old miners on Vancouver Island.

PW [00:13:44] Yeah.

DS [00:13:44] That were there for the Great Strike because you were there while they were being interviewed.

PW [00:13:49] Yes, and as I said there, their voices just stayed in my head because I, of course, to do that Sound Heritage magazine I had, oh ,my goodness, I had to go over and over and over. And also, at the time, they hired transcriptionists, but they weren't trade unionists, so they had no idea. And just like we have to do today, you really had to do a lot of research to figure out, okay, did they actually hear this properly. I mean kudos to Howie for doing that amazing work and then giving it to the Archives because what worries me is I think some of it's gotten corrupted because they haven't been able to digitize all of it. And unfortunately, that's, why it's so great what the Labour Heritage Centre is doing now, because these things are going to be remembered forever and they're not going to be corrupt.

DS [00:14:53] Is there any one or two interviews that really stick out in your mind?

PW [00:14:59] The Red Walsh one was really interesting, but you know what? They were all, every single one of them. They really had, everybody had a good thing to say. I think that maybe there were some. Howie probably didn't keep ones where people didn't really have anything to say. I have the feeling, because really, all of them. There was this woman named Jenny Shouldice that was so interesting as well from the Island. All of them were really were very interesting. This guy named Art Clark that I interviewed for the Carpenters, he was such a great storyteller and he had stories about marching from Nanaimo down to Victoria during the Hungry '30s and just really, really great stuff. So then, I guess what happened is that Co-op Radio ruined me for working in any kind of media after that, that basically would have a lot of rules again.

PW [00:16:14] So I just thought, you know, I've got to do something different. I really did. As I said, I babysat since the age of ten. So I loved caring for people and I just thought, "I'm going to do a complete change and I'm going to go to nursing school." So that was, I think around 1980, I became a nurse, and my first job was at Vancouver General Hospital. And it's so interesting because, nobody would believe you if you said at that time it was actually quite hard to get a nursing job. I actually wanted to work in Labour and Delivery, but there were no jobs available in that. So I got hired at VGH and this is, it's interesting where and I said I wasn't so great about rules, rigid rules, or certainly not military approaches to things. I found myself in one of the most rigid and most militaristic sectors ever which is in, really, health care. Especially at the time. The working conditions were not good really at all. I can remember I didn't work 12 -hour shifts to begin with, and it was crazy. If you can imagine, my shifts were seven days in a row and then three days off. No, sorry, eight days in a row, then three days off and then seven nights in a row. Yeah, it was obvious that there was a lot of need for the union to get cracking. The union came into-- B.C. Nurses' Union came into existence in 1981. So that was the start of things beginning to change. But I think in order to counter this rules, very hidebound situation, I of course became active in the B.C. Nurses' Union. I became a steward. We did a lot of social justice stuff as well. We were big support--this was the stewards at VGH and what we called the-- BCNU doesn't have locals. It was the South Vancouver region and we were active in medical aid to Nicaragua. I was out all over visiting hospitals and things begging for equipment that we could send to Nicaragua. We also used to have a great gathering, I guess it was once a month, women in--I think we just called it Union Women. We used to

gather at La Quena because they gave us, we didn't have to pay to rent it, and they would just make empanadas for us.

DS [00:19:23] What is La Quena?

PW [00:19:24] La Quena it was a restaurant on Commercial Drive. We had guest speakers and it was great. It was much different in that most of the people that were involved, it was because they were totally committed to social justice and to making things better for workers and especially for nurses at the time. Now, I missed out on a lot of the fireworks because I actually made a decision. My partner and I decided to move to England because I wanted to pursue midwifery. So I missed the big 1989 strike. But at the time, our region, led by the activists in our region, Debra McPherson, Bernadette Stringer, Shirley Ross, these were some of my friends and we were considered rabble rousers. We were starting to push back against what we thought was a very top-down union. We wanted to have a union that really had more power to individual members.

PW [00:20:40] Then I abandoned everybody and went to England. The way it worked there, it was almost like an apprenticeship. You had to be a registered nurse to go into midwifery. My first shift, I'll never forget it because it was on a Sunday and there was zero orientation, absolutely none. So I went from, at that point I had been working in critical care, so I had quite a bit of intense nursing experience, but I was on a postpartum ward and it was a very, very interesting hospital because I had applied to St Bartholomew's, which is one of the oldest and most prestigious hospitals in London. But they got back to me and said, "We've got a big waiting list. I hope you don't mind, but we've sent your application to the Mothers'" which was a hospital in Hackney, East London. I said, "Oh, no problem, that's fine," and they said, "Oh, and by the way, it's a Salvation Army hospital." That, to me, well Grace, which was the original maternity hospital in Vancouver, was Salvation Army as well. I thought, "Hmm, it would be like that." Well, it was a little bit more Salvation Army because on Sunday when I arrived, without any orientation, the first thing they said to me was, "Could you lead prayers, please?" And I said, "No, sorry, I couldn't lead prayers." (laughs) But it was such a wonderful experience. The diversity at that hospital was incredible. Women from all over the world were living in Hackney, really. So it was a wonderful experience. It also turned out to be a very good hospital to do your midwifery in because it had no prestige. So, the top of the doctor chain in the UK is called a consultant and if you call them 'doctor,' they'd flip out. They are 'Miss,' 'Mrs.', or 'Mr.' Anyway, they hardly set foot in the place because it was considered not a prestigious hospital, but consequently a fantastic experience for me. However, my partner and I were alone there without any family or anything like that. Then I had my first child and I just couldn't continue. There was some crazy stuff, like they didn't want you to work past six months and then they expected you to go back to work at six weeks. So I decided, "Nope, not going to be happening." Then, so I thought, "What on earth am I going to do now?" So, my partner said, "Well, why don't you do a master's degree?" I thought, "Oh, okay," and I ended up doing a master's degree, which was very interesting.

DS [00:23:53] In Nursing?

PW [00:23:55] It was actually not. It was in sociology, but it was medical sociology. It was a university, the University of Surrey, which is funny when you think of it, because it was in a place called Guildford. Anyway, they had wanted to have a cohort of people who were either nurses or social workers etcetera. It was a very interest— aside from the stats which I had to— Oh!, the statistics almost killed me because you had to do research methodology, then you had to learn everything about research. But it was very interesting

because the whole focus was on health care really and health care systems. So it was very interesting, except that I was a little bit overambitious and I started in the program which were classes all day long, was like a 12-hour day every Friday, when my son was three weeks old. I survived. We all survived. At that point, I had to then think, "Okay, I need to start earning a living again." I had done some interesting things in Hackney. I was hired on a research project to interview over-85-year olds in the borough, which was so interesting. It wasn't oral history. It was basically to find out about what the needs of the older, over-85-year olds in the borough were. But it might as well have been oral history, labour history, because, of course we got chatting, and it was a very interesting thing. Then I applied for a job at, it was called the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre, and I was hired there. This was very interesting because in terms of the labour movement, when we arrived in London in 1984, it was right in the middle—well yeah, I guess it was the middle of the Miners' strike. So we went on huge marches in London and these are like hundreds of thousands of people. So, the trade union movement, it was an interesting time because the history was fantastic there. The strength had been unbelievable, and then Margaret Thatcher hit and she just decimated so much of the of the labour movement. It was certainly the Miners'. It was a strange time.

DS [00:26:40] It was sort of full circle to your original interest in coal mining.

PW [00:26:43] Yes. Yes. So, there I was again. I went down the feminist and health care path because the Reproductive Rights Information Centre was basically born out of the campaigns to protect abortion and other reproductive rights in England. At the time there was a thing called the Greater London Council, which was very, very progressive. Ken Livingston was the Mayor of London at the time, and I was absolutely shocked at how progressive that local government was. It was unbelievable what they funded. Thatcher, for that reason, Thatcher hated them because they were so progressive.

DS [00:27:41] What sort of things did they fund?

PW [00:27:42] They funded, well, there was all sorts of great things, like they would put on these fantastic concerts like Rock Against Racism. They were very, very ahead of many other places in terms of tackling racism. Racism in England is terrible today, and it had been traditionally but at that time there was a lot of work being done to try and tackle the most blatant racism. When they knew that Thatcher was going to abolish the GLC (Greater London Council). So one of the last things that the GLC did was give, basically give a bunch of women's organizations a whole building. It wasn't a shabby building, it was right on the edge of the banking district. So the real estate was not anything for them to thumb your nose at really. The building was full of women's organizations, so it was great. As a matter of fact, men weren't allowed in unless they were accompanied.

DS [00:28:54] So is this all after you had children or before or?

PW [00:28:58] Yes, this was after. That was the other thing, we were very progressive as a women's organization. It was funny because we decided that we probably should be in a union, not that we needed one. As a matter of fact, we had to actually tell our board, "No, no, no, we can't afford to do that," when they tried to give us increases and things like that because we knew we didn't have the money. We joined this union called Manufacturing, Science and Finance, which was huge. That was one of the things that happened after the attacks on the unions, is that there was a lot of amalgamations. So the unions became really, really big. Never once did we have to call upon the services of the union. Anyway, long story short is that I was there for nine years and then finally we thought, "Oh, I guess

maybe we should come back to BC." We did, and we came at the worst possible time for a nurse to find a job because, at the time, the health care unions had all negotiated with the NDP government at the time. It was an interesting thing because it's true that advances in technology and health care meant that you didn't have to spend so long in hospital if you had an operation. When I was first working as a nurse, if you had your gallbladder out, you stayed for a week and of course, now it's a day surgery. There was something to the fact that you didn't need as many hospital beds. But the NDP, of course, decided that they weren't going to just throw everybody out in the street. So the Accord was negotiated and there was a managed reduction. Peter Burton and Peter Cameron were very active in that. They actually had never worked in health care, so they didn't quite understand that if you reduce the number of beds, the workload actually goes up. Because when I first started working as a nurse, when you had your assignment, you would have a few—like when you worked in surgery—you'd have a few post-ops, but you'd also have people that were at the end of their hospital stay. So they really didn't need a lot of work. Well 'boom!' when that was changed, you went to every single patient you had was basically high intensity. So unfortunately, that I think was the origins of a lot of the workload, but nonetheless the agreement was that the workforce would be reduced. So, I couldn't get a job. I applied for so many jobs, I couldn't get work at all. I ended up cobbling together a few different things and got hired, if you could believe, I got hired again to the oocyte retrieval clinic at Vancouver General Hospital, because I'd done a lot of work on infertility. That was part of what we did in the Women's Health Information Centre that I worked at. So the oocyte retrieval was for women who were going through IVF, but there wasn't even one regular part-time position. They were all, it was all casual and you basically signed up and said, "Oh, I could do these ones." Then if a woman was ready to have her oocytes harvested, they would say, "Okay, you're on," and then it was like four-hour shifts. So I was doing all of this little, all these crazy things.

PW [00:32:44] I ended up being hired to start a research project—it was part-time again—on IVF and implantation rates. So I was setting up a research project when I got called, actually it was a recruitment agency, which is so strange, but for some reason at the time BCNU (B.C. Nurses' Union) was looking for some new people and they had hired a company to hire, which they had never done. Anyway, I got asked if I would consider a job at BCNU, and it was interesting because at the time, they said, "Oh, this would only be a temporary position, a one-year temporary." I said, "Well, forget it then. I'm not, there's no way. I am in the middle of this research, setting up this research project and this, that and the other thing and I'm not going to abandon it for anything other than a regular full-time position. So the next thing you know they were offering me a regular full-time position, and I got hired as a communications officer at BCNU in 1995.

PW [00:34:06] It was an interesting time. Remember, I said earlier that a lot of the activists were kind of pushing back against the top-down approach of the union? Well, Anne Harvey was the Chief Operating Officer at the time when I was hired, and she really wanted to change the model of our union service delivery to adopt the organizing model, which of course was something that really made a lot of sense to me. It's a model that, it's an empowerment model. Basically the union is driven by the priorities of activists at the grassroots level. So that was one of the first things that I got to work on. I had to do a lot of the communication or when we were bargaining. I didn't particularly like bargaining, but I was expected to. Anne expected that all the Communication Department was basically there to communicate again, to make sure that our members were always completely informed about what was going on with bargaining. So part of that department was also the campaigns because the organizing model really required campaigns. So we were very, very adept at mounting campaigns. We'd go out to workplaces where a member had a

certain issue and we would help them organize a campaign. So it was very interesting work at the time, but I really wasn't using my research skills and the health care systems information that my experience and knowledge was. Over time I was supported—Debra McPherson was a big supporter of this—to actually work more on policy and research.

PW [00:36:21] So I did. I worked on some really great projects, including a lot of tripartite ones. The nursing shortage is—I mean, people talk about the nursing shortage now and it's serious and it's terribly problematic, but it has been around for quite some time. I actually worked on a project with somebody from the Ministry, Karen Jewel from HEABC (Health Employers Association of B.C.), and Peter Cameron, who was at HSA (Health Sciences Association) at the time. We were seconded to work on a project on the nursing shortage. I can't even remember what year that was, but I think it was the late nineties. So that was one of the interesting things that I did. I became immersed in nursing policy and basically anything to do with staffing, etcetera etcetera. I would be asked to go to bargaining every time we bargained. I would go and give presentations until I was blue in the face on things like 'why nurse patient ratios would be such a good idea'. Oh my goodness! That went on, time after time after time. I had all the research. I could reel off all the research. I provided huge amounts of research to the employers, to the government, but unfortunately, they just weren't ready to actually adopt that. So you can imagine how impressed and actually amazed I was—it had nothing to do with me—in the last round of bargaining when the nurses actually won ratios. So it was extremely interesting.

PW [00:38:17] Another very good collaborative project I worked on was something to help basically the nursing system. Now, a new grad is thrown in. It was terrible. This was another thing I would go to bargaining. I'd go to all sorts of employer meetings and say, "We have to do something to support new grads. It's crazy." A new grad could be called upon to be in charge of a unit when they hadn't even, they really hadn't consolidated their practice. So we were adamant that something needed to be done about that. This was another thing Anne had applied. She worked with other people and had applied and said we should do a big research project which was funded by the federal government, and that was the Educator Pathway Project. So the first part of it was to actually provide nurses, existing registered nurses with some skills so that they could mentor—we called it be a preceptor for a student. The pathway could take you right up to doing your Master's in Nursing and Education. So that was really interesting.

PW [00:39:33] Another thing again, Anne did so many interesting things in the early days and she was thinking too, we had many discussions about, "How do you support student nurses?" She had the idea that we should have employed student nurses. So I worked with Anne Harvey and a woman, her name is now Anne Chisholm, who had been the head of nursing for one of the previous health authorities, the smaller one over on the Island. Whenever somebody says, "Oh, you can't ever change anything," I say, "Oh yeah, in six months we had everybody on board." We had the employers, the Health Employers Association of B.C., we had the regulatory college at the time, which was the RNABC (Registered Nurses Association of B.C.). We had the education sector and we had the union. We were all on side to create an employed student nurse position. It wasn't without a few hiccups, but these were some of the amazing things that I got to work with. Always, it was very collaborative.

PW [00:40:55] I can't begin to tell you how many committees that I worked on. We were always invited. Actually, it was quite interesting. Working when the NDP (New Democratic Party) was in power was the most collaborative. We could call over to Victoria to the P.A.s (Parliamentary Assistants) and talk to them about ideas. When the Liberals were elected in

2001, which was such a blow on so many areas, but it was very interesting. We still got to meet with elected people, but we could no longer phone it to a P.A. and say, "Here is an issue and let's figure out how we can address it." So it was very interesting seeing those differences over my career. I eventually became the Director. Actually, I was the Director of Communications and the Professional Practice Department, which it was certainly a challenge. Then I retired in 2018. About that time, Rod Mickleburgh, a long friend and colleague, said, "Oh, I want you to come and talk to Ken because I think you should get involved in the Labour Heritage Centre. So, I went full circle. I went back to my early days and decided to volunteer with the Labour Heritage Centre, which I've thoroughly enjoyed. I also volunteered at the North Van Archives, which is another thing that I've enjoyed. I haven't been, let's say, I haven't really been sitting around doing nothing since I retired. I really, really enjoy doing the work here and also working on the podcast as you mentioned earlier. It's so great to be able to have the voices, not only the voices of the people, the archival material, but of course we can draw upon the people that have been interviewed as part of the oral history project as well here.

DS [00:43:29] Yeah. And you've seen that recently.

PW [00:43:31] Yes.

DS [00:43:31] You're always knowing where to go. You spent a lot of time being like a bureaucrat with the Nurses' Union. Did you ever miss being in a clinical setting?

PW [00:43:44] I missed, at first, oh, my goodness. I missed it immensely. It is interesting because it was the experience at VGH was, as I said there were so many rules about what you could do. What I loved, I really loved the direct patient care. The same thing when I was doing the midwifery, it was fantastic. Actually at the Women's Health Information Centre, we talked to women all the time. So even though I wasn't doing clinical things, although I was a sessional counsellor at an abortion clinic while I was there, and we used to do pregnancy testing for women too, but we got to talk to women all over the country and provide them with information. We had to be careful. It wasn't clinical advice because we didn't have the authority, but we provided with information to empower them. So I felt that I was still doing that. When I started working at the Nurses' Union, I was a firm believer that what's good for nurses is actually good for patients. So that's how I kept—the thread was still there in terms of making sure that if a nurse worked in a good environment, then she could provide better care. So that was the thread. But I really, really missed it at first. At times I thought, "What on earth am I doing, because really my passion is to be out there delivering care." But anyway, I had to do it vicariously.

DS [00:45:36] I wonder if you could comment a bit on being a trade unionist in the nursing profession. What changes have you noticed among nurses in terms of them becoming, I'm not sure if 'radicalized' is the word, but more aware of the fact that they're working people?

PW [00:45:59] Well, I think a lot of it had to do with being the communicator, basically the communication increasing immensely. I would suggest, I still don't think that nurses as a whole are terribly into trade unionism, to be honest, but they have all seen the amazing improvements to their collective agreements. I mean, there are always people that want more. But really, if you compare the working conditions and everything that I know nurses had to experience until the union got strong over the years, I think anybody will recognize that the union has done an immense amount of work for nurses. I think that there are, there is like anything else, a lot of young nurses. There are a lot of nurses who are very interested in the environment and that's how I think unions basically have to remain current

to things that their members are actually interested in. That's something that we paid a lot of attention to that and polling our members and working to try and find out what were the passions that our nurses had. BCNU has always had a lot of stewards though, so there's a strong committed core group of activists. Social media has its ups and downs, as we all know. It's very easy to criticize as much as it is to get information. I think that nurses are no different than the general public. You've got nurses who have all sorts of backgrounds and all sorts of passions and that's just a reality of the labour movement today.

DS [00:48:16] You said that when you were young your mother was a nurse, and there was no way you wanted to be a nurse just for that reason. What would you say today to a daughter that held the same opinion that, "you were a nurse and there's no way I'm going to be a nurse"?

PW [00:48:35] Well, it's very interesting because I think I have had such an amazing career. I know we talked earlier about the work I was doing in communications, but really the career I've had because of the fact that I was a registered nurse is really unbelievable. I've done so many interesting things. I've been part of very innovative pieces of work. I didn't mention this earlier, but because of the Educator Pathway Project, I actually became an Adjunct Professor at the UBC School of Nursing. I was so lucky. Again, this is what I can tell the young nurses that I was so lucky that the union supported me through all of that. I actually went and delivered a paper to a couple of big conferences, once in Ireland, and once in Sydney, Australia, and was supported to do that. I can guarantee you that people were very surprised when I said I was from B.C Nurses' Union. It was quite rewarding to be part of that groundbreaking when the nurses' unions in general hadn't really understood research before. Here I was, co-presenting with nurse academics from UBC, and so it was really quite, it was very rewarding to be able to do that, to go to conferences and say, "By the way, I am a union member." Most employers aren't exactly happy to be working with the unions, to be perfectly frank. There's a lot of feeling that unions never, that they are always resistant to change. That's why again I could say, "Oh yeah, well, here's this employed student nurse. Here are these things that we've done, and I am very proudly a trade unionist and have worked for many years for a union." So it was really great to be able to say that. To young people I just say, "Okay, look at all the doors that can open for you if you just take that chance."