

Interview: Bob Buzza (BB)

Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)

Assisted by: Al Cornes and Lesley Harrington

Date: July 21, 2016

Location: Vancouver, BC

[00:00:10] KN: Good morning. We're here to interview Bob Buzza, who was the President of the BCTF in 1967-68. Today is July 21st, 2016; the interview is being conducted by Ken Novakowski, assisted by Al Cornes, with technical assistance from Lesley Harrington. Good morning, Bob.

[00:00:32] BB: Good morning!

[00:00:34] KN: We're going to start off with some questions about your early life—where and when were you born, and where were you raised?

[00:00:44] BB: I was born in Vancouver, April 17th, way back in 1932. My parents also were born in Vancouver, which is unusual. I went to the same elementary school as my mother and father. At their time they encountered bear and cougar on the way, and that was not true by the time I got there. Beacon's Hill school in the Vancouver's East End. Both sides had fairly large families; 8 to 9 kids, that type of thing, on their side. In terms of my mother's family, my dad's family, there were four of us; and I was the lead-hand. When I was thirteen they had four other sons. A surprise turn, surprised me. I went from there to Britannia. Most of the students at that school, Beacon's Hill, went onto tech, and some of us, I was hived-off along with had a dozen others to go to Britannia, which I did. That's where I met my future wife; and now my wife of over 60 years; and was fortunate enough, in a way, to take extra credits. They had a credit system at the time, and I, as a result, didn't take Grade 12;

[00:02:01] BB: I did Grade 12 in effect, at Summer school by topping-up the credits; and after I went to Normal School, for the \$57 special for teachers-to-be at that time. OK?

[00:02:16] KN: What can you tell us about your family? Were they political at all, or

[00:02:20] KN: were they union, or..?

[00:03:03] BB: They weren't officially political at all, although my mother was very political. Some of the shorts she wrote about Vander Zalm, for example, are really priceless. She also was a poet, and for every special occasion in the family, for a birth, a death, a graduation, we got a poem, which was put together as a booklet, so she was the poet of the family. My dad—this was in the 1930s, of course— and I was born in 1932—actually rode the rails for the better part of two years; trying to keep things together and sending that money home, that type of thing. And he, himself was a plasterer by trade; eventually a master-plasterer by trade; and did stucco work as well. But also, as did I, he delivered coal, delivered saw-dust; that type of thing. Anything to

put food on the table. So, he, eventually, built a home in the Vancouver's East End, and that's why I lived there; and grew up. The two sides of the family were chalk and cheese. The one side, very religious, evangelical, very seldom showing signs of affection; the other side—the complete reverse. 12–13 for dinner every Sunday; hugging and kissing, and bum-pinching and laughing, very open and warm.

[00:03:47] BB: So there was quite the contrast between the two families, that they didn't intermingle much, at all, really, except through my mom and dad, and their families.

[00:03:58] KN: Can you tell us anything about your experiences in school; either in elementary school, or secondary school, that stood out in your mind: the teachers that you've had, anything memorable, or anything like that?

[00:04:09] BB: Well, we had Ms. Maze as an English teacher. She was really, quite amazing. At Britannia they had, in particular, a fine cadre of teachers at the time. Cornel Bukyoul; he was Shirley Churches' dad, actually, he was the principal. Once I was leaving the auditorium, and was tripped, and he yelled at me from the stage, so he obviously, knew (students) by name: Buzza! and then—gave me a hard time for having been tripped. So, I told him, I was tripped, for Christ's' sake! So, he told me to get to the office. I had a paper route of 176, covered a large area. And he was going to—and did, he told me I had to be in after school for a couple of nights, and I told him after the second one, I said, look, this is what... Nah he said, OK, enough's enough. He knew I wasn't normally a bad boy.

[00:05:14] KN: So, that sticks out, obviously. What about the Normal School; from Normal School, did you go to university?

[00:05:22] BB: Yes, the Normal School was of course one year, and there were a fair number of veterans there, coming back from the World War II. So, it was really a mixed bag. And I found it really helpful, because there was quite a bit of hand-on stuff, in terms of what you did in your practicum; that type of thing. But it was really quite challenging at 19 to go to Kimberley without a suit. I think I told you in the past—my uncle Cecil donated his suit, so I had a suit for my first job; and I found that Normal School training was, in some ways, superior to what I've experienced subsequently at the teacher training at University of British Columbia. It was more pragmatic and reality-based. So, there's a perception.

[00:06:15] KN: And where and when did you have your first teaching job?

[00:06:19] BB: It was in Kimberley. And it was a tough market at that time. I put out over 30 resumes, and finally got a job offer at two (municipalities), and Kimberley had a bigger "dot"; so I applied to Kimberley. And I was accepted; to the A.A. Watkins staff with Johnny Lucas. You asked about earlier, Ken I haven't picked up on it; the university aspect in terms of education...

[00:06:48] KN: Yes.

[00:07:17] BB: After a couple of years in Kimberley I went to UBC and got a Bachelor of Arts degree; and then began teaching in Burnaby; and subsequently got a Master's degree and did some work to earn a PhD along the way as well. So, in Kimberley it was an active group in terms of the BCTF. There was a guy named Larry Gerstein there, and he was particularly interested in teacher pensions. And they subsidized me to come to the AGM, because I was coming to the coast anyhow, so that was one of the reasons I ended-up going to the AGM in my first year. I had to promise that I had to report back to them. And the reporting back was painful, because, I, though I had taken notes—I could not adequately handle most of the questions that came my way from, I used the word, “grey beards”—they were all in their sixties.

[00:07:47] BB: And it was an interrogation, particularly on pension matters, that's when I failed the test. And we also always went to meetings en-masse. Teacher meetings. The elementary staffs—there were a couple—were marched down the streets by the principal to the secondary school, where the meetings were held, so it took me a few weeks to realize that this was not obligatory. You didn't have to go, the expectation was that you would, and you did.

[00:08:21] KN: So, what did you teach, and at what grade level?

[00:08:25] BB: I had a very unusual teaching career, because I started out at the intermediate level and the elementary level, teaching Grade 6 class at the Watkins school. And I recall the composition of the class was unusual—they had a polio scare there, and one of the lads was two years over-age and he could not write. And I kept him behind for a few minutes on the very first day, and said, Larry, can you just read this out? —he was reading stuff that I couldn't interpret that he had written down. So I wrote it on the board, and he couldn't read it back to me in my script. So, it took quite a while to get him up to about a Grade 4 level. But there was another boy, who I'll just give his first name, Georgie, and he functioned, probably, at about five or six-year-old level. Quite a damaged kid. And there was another lad, who I'll name, Dale Joe, who was absolutely brilliant, reading at Grade 12 level, so in that first class there was a range beyond description. The assistance that I sought for the special needs kids, who were obviously, part of the class, was really non-existent.

[00:09:44] BB: It was almost mid-November before somebody came by. And he wasn't helpful at all, really. Then, when I ended-up in Kimberley, it was at the junior secondary level school, where there was a major fire; and as a result of the major fire we moved out some of the classrooms, and the other three teachers, and I, who were in the elementary school temporarily, had never taught before; so some of that was difficult, because some of the females in particular had to resign by Christmas, as they could not control their class. She didn't have the skills to deal with young kids—they basically were vicious with her. And, even though, there was help provided, it didn't work in her case. But I taught a really wide variety of courses at that level. Total secondary school courses are 34; all the way from Personal Health, Physical Ed, Science, Art, Social Studies, etc. Plus, counselling—I had a background in that area as well. So, it was really varied—in fact I had never taught primary, and when I went to Ridges school as vice-

principal, I had a gal named Ethel Burnett, a wonderful primary teacher and she let me come in and practise with their kids. Little kids, which was a great experience.

[00:11:14] BB: So, it really does cover the gamut of age-range and subject matter. In fact, in Alpha, Jack, who was the principal in Burnaby; and he did not use the computer at the time, with respect to scheduling teachers and classes, and that type of thing; and I was the last one scheduled. And I asked him some years later, and he said, well, you never complained (laughs). Whatever they got me to teach I tried to teach. So, it was a mixed bag.

[00:11:51] KN: So, you talked about your teaching in Kimberley. And then you went to, you said, back to school; and then, eventually, you ended-up in Burnaby; teaching in Burnaby. Could you talk a bit about your teaching career in Burnaby? You were teaching, and eventually you went to the

[00:12:11] KN: Ministry.

[00:12:34] BB: Yes. I was at several schools, actually, in Burnaby. The first was Alpha, I was assigned subsequently to be the vice-principal at the school, after Chaffie died, and I ended-up being appointed as an interim principal. And I had a good time confirming that interim, where I had full responsibility, because it was in fact, an interim. I think, in fact, they used a word other than interim. But I also went to Chaffie Burke, as principal, and that was in a higher-end community, if you like, in Burnaby; with an active parent group, dominated by men.

[00:12:57] BB: Second Street School is another one that I went as an acting principal; was in a different socio-economic subset. I was vice-principal at the McPherson Park, which is now a secondary school in Burnaby; with Elmer Sinclair, and also was part of that. The head of the Social Studies department at Burnaby South was Norm McDonald, a "capital L liberal". Had an incident with him from the first day. They had 5 lunchrooms; and he was in what was called the Ash Room. And I went in there and there were only 8 or 9 people there. And a couple or three days later I went to the Annex and there were maybe 15 or 20 staff out into that area; and

[00:13:47] BB: then there were two sub-sets, where enclaves of 3 to 5 had their lunches. And he made a comment about Jack Gilmore being a communist. And I said, Jack Gilmore is not a communist. And he wrote me off. I said, I'll see you after school. So, I went to his office and let him know that Gilmore had been responsible for expunging Marxists and so forth, from the New Democratic Party. And he said to me you know, Bob, I even suspect conservatives. He was a "capital L liberal". The people who were in power positions in that district at the time were all members well-placed within liberal ranks. So, he himself was an effective principal, but he had some biases, that... I told him I would charge him under the code of ethics if he didn't apologize the next day. And he did. He apologized the next day. So, that's one memory that I hadn't planned to share.

[00:14:53] KN: You knowing about the code of ethics, you must have been active in the local by this time and in the Federation. You talked a bit about going to the AGM in your first year of

teaching. So, when did you actually become more involved in the local and then in the Federation?

[00:15:15] BB: Well that same first year. I was asked by Clair Mercer, who was a secondary teacher, if I would join the bargaining committee to represent the elementary teachers. This is in Kimberley; so I said, well, I don't know anything about it, etc. And she said, listen, I spoke to several people and they think... Nobody else wants to do it, basically, what she was saying; and at the same time she was buttering me up. So I did it, and we ended-up in arbitration, in Creston, that first year. And then I was the delegate to the AGM that first year, so from then on I was always involved. In Burnaby I was the geographic rep; I became the president in Burnaby. In terms of number of committees and so forth, I've served on within the Federation; I think you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone on the list who served on more.

[00:16:15] KN: Did anything stand out for you in terms of your time as president of the Burnaby local?

[00:16:23] BB: This is not directly related to the presidency, but we were having a referendum. Remember they changed the finance formula at one stage? And I worked closely with the board office—and I wasn't president at that time—to bring about a successful vote. And that was greatly appreciated. But I was asked to take on a position of secondary consultant. They had no department heads, so my responsibility was for 170 teachers; 85 new to teaching, 85 new to the district; across all disciplines. Junior secondary and senior secondary, in a system in transition to the district.

[00:17:11] BB: And within that group there were two or three who were having serious problems. And in one case I went into an office at Moscrop School, where a chap was over 6 foot, great voice, great presence. I went into the back of the room, he knew why I was coming and a girl was telling: "Why don't you just fuck off". And I of course, took exception to that, and took her down to the principal. And when I went back to talk to him about how he would countenance that type of thing; he said, I don't know. They realized he was a homosexual;

[00:17:52] BB: and he wasn't overtly a homosexual, but the kids sensed that in him, and they were feasting on him. So, he said, well, you come in and see what happens. And, of course, I went in the next day and there was no difficulty. It was a different class, but nonetheless it was where it happened. So, I got him transferred to a different school. I did that for three people. And in two of the three, it worked; in his case, it didn't. So, they asked me at the end of the first year, I guess, what I thought of the position. I said it should be eliminated. It was bizarre.

[00:18:32] BB: I remember going to Jim Bradley, who was the principal of the Burnaby North back then, a really flamboyant, outgoing great Italian, etc. And he says, you're a what? And I said I was teacher-consultant. What the hell is that?—he says. What are you doing here? Do you write any reports? No, I don't write reports I said; so I got quite an interrogation from him, but within a year after that they started setting up department heads formally, so people would get one-on-one assistance.

[00:19:00] BB: The one that worked out really well was a chap, who had a commerce teacher background, who was expected to teach Phys-ed. And he was drowning. So, I knew a chap from my time in Alpha, who was a superb Phys-ed teacher, Harry Pryde, to come in with him, while we hired a substitute. So, I managed to squeeze enough funds out of the board, that we hired a few substitutes for particular situations. And within two weeks the chap at the other end was doing just fine, feeling a lot better, sleeping better, so, there were good memories along the way.

[00:19:47] KN: What about the BCTF, were you active in your local? How did you get active at the BCTF. Did you serve on committees?

[00:19:54] BB: I was the geographic rep from Burnaby to the representative assembly. And I got nominated; so then I got involved. I was told after the fact, when my name was put forward as president, I was the last secretary treasurer, an elected secretary treasurer of the BCTF, when they eliminated that position. And by the way, that was quite a story, you will know the name, Norm Ornes, who was at Vancouver Tech, and has now passed,

[00:20:30] BB: but anyway, Ornes was fantastic on the economic side. And I was to make a presentation to the Annual Meeting, and boy, did I do my homework! And I spent quite a bit of time with him. I had notes off to the side and all sorts of stuff going on, so I could answer any question anybody wanted to ask. And there was a motion put; and I was told I'm the one who suggested it, that we get on with it. Are there any questions? So, there was a couple of hours that was freed-up and I was never asked a single thing after all that preparation.

[00:21:13] BB: I remember others on the committee that was planning the program for the Annual Meeting, desperately trying to figure out what to do with the additional time.

[00:21:24] KN: So at that AGM, in this period of time, roughly, how many people would there be at the Annual General Meeting?

[00:21:30] KN: Media would be there, too...

[00:21:31] BB: I think, close to 500 still.

[00:21:35] KN: A large one.

[00:21:39] BB: Yeah, yeah.

[00:21:44] KN: OK, so then you, eventually did run the Federation's President. Did you, sort of, had that as an objective in your thinking, or how did that happen?

[00:21:49] BB: Anything but, to tell you the truth. When I entered teaching, or did all this other stuff, I never thought of being president. But I was nominated, and Harley Robertson was also nominated. And I found out quite directly about 7 or 8 years later, that I was ahead of him in the first ballot. I think there was more than the two of us running. And the consensus was that, well,

he's young and Harley got in. There was also a reality at that time, they were trying to balance off the rural with the city folk, usually, alternatively.

[00:22:09] KN: So, when was that, that must have been 1965.

[00:22:30] KN: And then you ran the next year.

[00:22:31] BB: Yes.

[00:22:33] KN: And were elected?

[00:22:35] BB: That's true.

[00:22:36] KN: Can you talk a bit about what kind of political, social and cultural context in British Columbia during this time of the late 1960s was. What was happening?

[00:22:51] BB: Well, one of the things that struck me was that some people within the Federation staff had a good working relationship with people in Victoria, in the department of ... administration of education. With Stan Evans being as the assistant general secretary, the best example. Because he knew every one of the MLAs on the first name basis, he knew most of their wives, their kids, tracked them; he was highly regarded, highly respected. And the Federation basically had several ways of influencing what was going on in Victoria.

[00:23:35] BB: The other—and this isn't part of your question—but we also had a disproportionate influence over curriculum in this province. Supposedly, the education departments at the university level were the teacher-trainers. But they used committees, and those committees were dominated by the BCTF members. I participated in a number of them, and both, the curriculum committees had the secondary and the elementary level for example. And I know what the results were and the 90% of the decisions were made by the BCTF members on those committees through the other organization. So, the control was much more pronounced that I suspect it is, now. And it wasn't part of the flow chart. It was reality. Now, back to your question. Do

[00:24:29] BB: you want to re-phrase it?

[00:24:30] KN: So, basically, during that period of time the Federation began to change in terms of this relationship with the politicians and with the Ministry. Up until then, it seemed, the Federation had been in sync with politics, and government, and would work well with the Ministry. But things started to change. Could you talk about that?

[00:24:54] BB: I agree with your summary. It did change. I think, in part, and this is a small part of it perhaps; the Federation became much more politicized as well. There were blocks organized, going to mics, with their own communication system; and all that type of thing, which became the reality. I assume that's long-gone, because that's so juvenile. Because, supposedly it is a collegial organization. Because we work together, we don't just go off into

camps and eat separately, and do that kind of juvenile nonsense, but I am assuming that is no longer the case.

[00:25:37] BB: But we got into that mode as well; and that type of “we/ they” reality was reflected, of course, with the people across the waters. Even the friction we had over the principals and vice-principals in the organization was a difficult one, as that went on for some years, as you here, and your partner (points to AC) know. And most of our leaders at that time had come from the administrative ranks, particularly in the early years. And they were almost always male, which, again, was unacceptable, but it was the reality. So, what happened in part, was that there were public displays of differences.

[00:26:25] BB: In the scrap-book that I bought, there is a second page of a Vancouver Sun article, featuring the minister of the day and me. And they were making changes to the education finance formula, which we found unacceptable. And we were addressing quite a large group of parents, and he took one position, and I took the other. And it was picked-up in more wholesome ways that had been the norm. And I was severely criticized by a sub-group within the Federation for having publicly embarrassed the minister. Even though the position being taken was arrived at collegially, within the Federation; and it wasn’t my position, it was considered to represent the opinions of thousands of teachers through their representatives.

[00:27:17] BB: So, I found that sort of amusing and sad in a way. But subsequently, too, there was a lot more attention paid. As Jim Iker might comment sometime (laughs), as to whether or not there was any press that featured him. And yourself. So, I haven’t responded directly to the question, have I? As to, how it became so formalized and oppositional. I think there were a lot of factors at work. The other thing, I think, we were a threat to any government, for obvious reasons—a large, well-educated group with a communication system; reasonable salaries, so there’s money to be had and that type of thing.

[00:28:06] BB: And when we took positions that were at odds with those wanting a different system, or different emphases; that created conflict. So, that’s probably more to the point.

[00:28:22] KN: So, looking back at your years as President; is there anything that stands out as a significant challenge for you that you had to deal with?

[00:28:37] BB: Ah. Let me comment on two or three things that weren’t challenges, and we may get to it. That was the year that the World Federation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession came to BC. And they ended up representing over 9 million teachers internationally, and something like 90 countries, etc. And Sir Ronald Gould was the leader. He was the secretary general of the National Union of Teachers in the UK. And we really put on a great show,

[00:29:09] BB: the weather co-operated, etc. It went over several days as you may recall; went up as far as Whistler. So, one of the cute things that I recall about that, is very first day that they arrived, he and his wife, I had a chance to speak to him and ask him if he had any plans for the evening; and “none at all”. So, I said, well, perhaps we could take you and your wife to dinner.

He said, oh, that would be wonderful. So, I got in touch with Charlie and Alma Ovans, my predecessor, and Charlie and his wife Alma joined us. So the six of us went to the Seven Seas, was it, at the foot of Lonsdale.

[00:29:52] BB: And I saw Lady Gould surreptitiously writing little notes as we were there. They had a fantastic display of seafood, etc.; so I asked her what she was doing. She said, Bob, they're never going to believe me, back home about how varied this meal is (laughs). The other thing I got a kick out of was, our daughter Tracey—and I have to give her credit; she was the transplantation donor for her elder sister, who is recovering from acute myeloid leukemia; but she was ten at the time. And she presented flowers to Lady Gould.

[00:30:37] BB: Then she had a chance to talk to her and I overheard her say to him... For Sir Ronald—we gave him a gift; Stan went and selected, from the Cowichan, one of those sweaters; beautifully knit sweaters. And Sir Ronald was a fisherman, right? And he still talked about it years later, after his wife died and he re-married his sweetheart from yester year. Anyway, she said, you know, I think you'd make a good grandpa! (Laughs). This is to the head of the NUT (National Union of Teachers). The other thing that we did that year, in a good-timely nature, and we got it very effectively done, really, was an education commission headed by Don Mackenzie.

[00:31:23] BB: I shouldn't say "headed". "Chaired", participated-in, by Don Mackenzie, who was the Assistant Superintendent in Vancouver. And that's an unusual choice for a BCTF-sponsored commission in its own right. But we did travel the province together. And the report was done at about the same time that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars more in Ontario, came out almost coincidentally with the same sort of flavour, in terms of significance. Some of the demands of that year, from my perspective were, and I think it's still a reality, it may not even be an issue. A failure on the part of some staff members to appreciate that they were staff, that they were no longer in a local, taking sides;

[00:32:21] BB: that if the Executive of the day made a decision, that decision was to be acted on, not undermined. So, there were several instances where people, from my perspective, were continuing to play a political role in a staff position that was inappropriate then, and would be inappropriate now. I don't know if it's an issue of any consequence at the present time or not, but there were two or three instances. We had also difficulty assigning people to certain districts.

[00:32:55] BB: People would say, god you can't send him here; he's a Marxist, or whatever. That type of thing, without even giving the person a fair shake, and trying to work with them; and then, writing a local that, hey! So, finding common ground wasn't always easy. That's a pretty minor response to your question.

[00:33:07] KN: That's good—

[00:33:20] KN: you gave us some of the highlights of your presidency. I think it is good for the record. Is there anything else you wanted to say about your presidency at all?

[00:33:29] BB: I'll tell you—my problem is, the presidency was a small chunk of 16 or 17 years spent in the office, and I get mixed up as to what happened when. I really don't care about the chronology and that kind of thing, so that's my problem. I am afraid I might get into Solidarity in 1983 or something like that—the thing could have happened in 1967 or 1968; all I know is that it mattered. And it happened (everyone laughs). And whether I was the President or the Executive Director at the time, is fundamentally irrelevant.

[00:34:01] KN: Let's move on then to talking to you as Executive Director, because you were the general secretary/ Executive Director for 16 years of Federation. And I know, those were very, very significant years. You were appointed as the general secretary in 1973. And one of the things that happened during those 16 years was the position of general secretary, which would have been Harry Charlesworth and Charlie Ovans and then, you; was changed to be called Executive Director. And it was time that it was assuming a different role, where the once spokesperson for the organization was changing into a different role. Would you care to talk a bit about the name change from the secretary general to the Executive Director, as to why that happened and when that happened? And then I'll come back and ask you a question about the change in the position.

[00:34:57] BB: My recommendation to the Executive Committee, as I recall, when the professional staff unionized that I was entering a separate contract as an exempt, and I suggested that it would be a more of an appropriate title. It was not that uncommon across the board, and it was indicative: you direct on behalf of the Executive. And I think it captures it in a nutshell. I'll mention you, my grandfather, when he found out I was appointed general secretary, was saying, how can they do that? you don't even type.

[00:35:31] BB: So, there was some misunderstanding as to what a general secretary was. The other thing that was happening, and this was where we get to the question you plan to pose; is that we had elected people as it should be, speaking on behalf of the organization, increasingly. And then, regularly. And it moved us along really quite well under the circumstances. So, it became accepted that those elected that had a constituency would speak to the organization. Not the Executive Director or staff people. There were some exceptions, but by a large, with people like Jim Killeen and others, it was clear that the spokesperson was no longer the Executive Director. He or she had a different role.

[00:36:19] KN: Bob, as you had indicated, you were appointed to the most significant staff position in the BCTF in 1973 and you remained until 1989. So, during that period you had seen a lot of change in the Federation. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind talking about how the Federation changed throughout that time period? By the size of staff, and the organization of the staff into what it was in 1989?

[00:36:56] BB: I think, some of the significant changes were both, in the sexism and racism fields, the social action fields. And it's to the credit of the organization that the initiatives were taken, mostly from a group labeled as progressive, loosely within the organization. They started

the women's program and came up with its own staff, its own network capability, and in many, many ways, changed the nature of the organization, really quite profoundly.

[00:37:29] BB: And then, with the racism field... I remember being criticized by my counterpart at the BC School Trustees' Association for meddling in that type of thing, that's not part of your mandate, sort of argument, which is in the face of it, ridiculous. And apart from the CEQ in Quebec, perhaps, and maybe the secondary teachers in Ontario, I don't think there was any other teacher group in Canada that got into that field, and sustained its interest in that field; and worked so closely with others related to that field at all. So, it was that, which stands out for me as being really significant. The unionization of the professional staff seemed to go fairly smoothly. And being exempt was not a major issue.

[00:38:34] BB: At Executive meetings, even in Committee, I was always free to say what I wanted to say, even if it was ignored. And I disagreed with, obviously, some decisions. And sometimes they were staff-related decisions. At one stage I was requested to make sure that somebody was no longer with us, etc. Even though there were no basis that would stand before a tribunal for taking the action suggested. Now, this, obviously was in-committee; so I'm being vague. And I made it very clear, that if we were to proceed along that line, and we take the action suggested, it would reverberate to the detriment of the Federation.

[00:39:24] BB: Because we would not win. We had no grounds, etc. So, sometimes there were issues like that that were difficult. The transition into the education finance arena was also significant. I remember being with Jack Webster, the Oatmeal Savage, asking questions about the education finance formula, and it would show that he was quite well-informed in many ways, really but he didn't understand the underpinnings that it was meant to provide equal opportunity for students everywhere. The underpinnings were fairly sound, even then. And he made a complimentary comment about that aspect of it subsequently.

[00:40:20] BB: The pension presentation took place during my term as President. And that was very significant for the teachers of BC. I say that as one of the major beneficiaries (laughs) because, a defined benefit plan is now, increasingly, rare, and even though it is not fully covered by inflation, etc.; it's been remarkable. I remember talking to a man from North Vancouver on his 103rd birthday, and he said, Bob, you won't believe it! I'm making twice what I used to make!

[00:40:59] BB: Now, that's in devalued dollars. But at least it was indexed. And the presentation was made with the senior Bennett, in the cabinet, and what surprised me is that senior Bennett, Wacky, was on a raised platform for his chair, looking down at us around the table. And Des Grady, the person, who got training while on staff, had been a teacher to be a lawyer, made a very significant presentation, and a well-received presentation; and it was a successful presentation. So, that stands out as a highlight. You were more interested in problems (laughs).

[00:41:21] KN: No—those are very important!

[00:41:43] KN: So, going back again, to your position as Executive Director; there was a move towards full collective bargaining: the organization's bargaining structure was created; you got involved in Solidarity, as you earlier mentioned; how did you deal with all those things, in terms of staff changes and all the rest of that?

[00:42:14] BB: Well, I don't have any memories of any difficulties of consequence whatsoever. The changes seemed to make sense to those, who were going to be affected, and therefore it was done and people went along. I'd be interested if you found anything contrary to that within your own experience.

[00:42:35] KN: No, I didn't. And it was an interesting period of time for the Federation.

[00:42:41] BB: There had been some more changes that I wasn't party to. For example, Larry Kuehn's position. It certainly wasn't as well-defined when I was President, as it is now. And this opportunity to do the kind of Solidarity outreach, particularly in Central America, but not just in Central America, I think, is a tribute to the organization.

[00:43:10] KN: Could you talk a bit about the Federation on the international stage.

[00:43:15] BB: As you know, the William R. Long memorial fund from Billy Long in Kitimat, was established, and the BC Teachers' Federation, including the members of its staff are among the dozens who had worked in various countries, to help those countries organize more effectively; or be more effective in the classroom, that type of thing. And I had the privilege of going to Ghana the first time with three others. One delegate from Ontario, one from Edmonton and one from Saskatchewan, who had just lost his wife and eight kids, and was a very effective blunt-spoken person.

[00:44:09] BB: I'll just give you one example; when we went to the Ghana NAT, the National Association of Teachers, we, of course went to see the king and all the government dignitaries and so forth. And the minister of finance invited us to come to a reception. And Tom Bedyako, he was not only the secretary general of the National Association of Teachers, he was on staff for Africa on the World Confederation of the World Organizations of the Teaching Profession.

[00:44:46] BB: So, it was interesting; they had a 50-piece band playing on the grounds, in the ninety-degree temperature, and lots of humidity, and we were then invited to meet with the finance minister, with a guy holding gun at the first landing; and then, another guy with a gun in the office. And the minister made the mistake of saying, in Eli's presence, how difficult it had been to do what they wanted to do with respect to teachers, because of the coca market. Well, he said, the cocoa market! Do you know what's going on in Canada with wheat?

[00:45:24] BB: And he went on as a farmer. And I saw the fellow to my left caulk his rifle just for a minute, and then this guy broke into a smile, he's talking to another farmer, right? And that night, the minister came to our place right in Kumasi. And he went in the back room with Bedyako, and they came out in an hour with an agreement for the country. So, that was the first

time. The second time I went to South Africa through the same program, and the Federation did something, in retrospect, I don't think it should ever have done.

[00:46:12] BB: That is, I was involved in Amnesty International, I was writing personal letters about people in trouble world-wide. So, I asked the Executive of the day if it would be OK if I used the Federation's letterhead, and my title, and they said, sure. Now, nobody told me what to write, or who to write to, or what to say. And that blank cheque, I think, is quite remarkable. I was also taken aside, when I got to London, and was held for a while, interrogated,

[00:46:51] BB: nobody else seemed to be; when I got to the airport, the authorities took me in for about 45 minutes. And I was clearly on a list, I suspect, because of my Amnesty International work. And, eventually, I got a chance to meet with a minister of education, who turned out to be an Aussie, which really startled me, but he gave me a letter, that opened doors everywhere, you know? For example, I went to Soweto, and didn't have any difficulty getting in there and meeting with teachers. Hamilton de la Menzie was the secretary general of the teachers' organization there; he actually came in and spoke, you may recall, Ken, to our meeting.

[00:47:36] BB: And, the contrast, I found there, between that group and what they were coping with the Norwegian and Canadian help versus what was happening with the Cape Coloured was so dramatic that it still startles me to this day. Somehow the funds that were being delivered were not being utilized effectively, "grab and dash" was a factor—we sent a ton of paper at one stage, to Ghana, it was taken from the docks! I was always shepherded when I went to Ghana, because I went there twice;

[00:48:17] BB: people met me, so I could avoid paying to get out of the country as I was trying to get into the country. Either way it was difficult. I was asked while I was there, in the North—this was through the WCOTP, but more particularly through Bob Barker, and the Canadian Teachers' Federation. I was working with middle school teachers, all females and all head-mistresses, head-teachers, principals, and there were about 22 or 23 of them. I was in a hotel that permitted this type of thing. Most hotels, of course, didn't accept blacks; a lot of them didn't accept blacks. For me to walk in followed by the 20-odd black women, first morning for breakfast, I still remember looking around and being quite amused by the response of some folk (laughs).

[00:49:13] BB: But then I was asked to go and meet with the Cape Coloured group, which I did. And they had 10 vehicles on the road, they had fantastic communication system, printing press, glossy stuff, they were so well organized in comparison to the black group that had had so much more financial assistance from the international groups that cared, that it was startling. It still bothers me to this day, because obviously, some people were ripping-off the system.

[00:49:47] BB: The third time was back to Ghana; on my own, at the request of Tom Bedyako. And we went to De Mongo, which is a national park, and I still remember getting up at 4:30 in the morning, because we started at 5:30, we were there for about 10 days, something like that, and I think, first time in the history of that organization people from around the country have

been brought together to try and improve the organization in many ways. And our job was to lay-out a five-year plan, and do it effectively, with cost and so forth. And we made it clear we were available. And we broke into groups and after brainstorming we came up with the topics.

[00:50:31] BB: The groups got involved. And they just about killed me. Some of them were still working at 2 o'clock at night. And then they'd get up at 5 or 5:30 in the morning; and all day long you're interacting. They came up with a five-year plan that was so superior to anything I've ever seen at the BC Teachers' Federation; there was no contest (laughs). And I was glad to be a part of that, but was unable to deliver; I didn't have the background or capability to deliver in the Federation something as well done.

[00:51:03] BB: I also got to work with Steve Manou, and Steve became well known to us here; he was from Ghana. I met him there, he was interested in curriculum areas, worked very closely with John Church. When he came here, he ended-up at SFU, got a degree from SFU, brought his daughter with him; and he was so effective at SFU, that in 2 classes he was asked to take over the class for periods of time, by the instructor, even though he was there as a student. So many examples! Fast, from Saskatchewan, I guess it was, he set-up a co-op system in Ghana, that as far as I know is still functioning effectively today;

[00:51:54] BB: so the impact of teachers, not just for BC, but around the country, several staff people who have been involved, as you know; including several past-presidents; in various ways. I think, all of that is commendable, that outreach is defensible and worthwhile.

[00:52:12] KN: So, one other thing about the period of time, when you were an Executive Director, say between 1973 and 1989, what was the size of staff do you remember? What was the overall number of staff that we had in 1973?

[00:52:28] BB: I think, in the high thirties, perhaps.

[00:52:32] KN: And then, in 1989?

[00:52:37] BB: We were really approaching 90, I really don't know. I think it is around 130 now.

[00:52:41] KN: We were up to 160 at one time.

[00:52:46] KN: I think we've gone down now, around 130-140.

[00:52:49] BB: OK. I'

[00:52:52] BB: m vague on the numbers.

[00:52:54] KN: We grew a lot since then.

[00:52:57] BB: Oh, yes. And most of it, justifiable, I think.

[00:53:00] KN: laughs) All of it.

[00:53:03] KN: Is there anything else, you'd like to say, Bob, about BC teachers' Federation and your experience at the BCTF?

[00:53:13] BB: Well, I think the organization is one of the most effective, still in the world. I wrote once, that because I went to world conferences and meetings, like, six of seven of them; all the way from Central America, to Togo; and, of course, Ireland. That was the first one. And I got to speak to a lot of people from a lot of different countries, and in terms of overall scope, breadth and significance of programs, that the Federation has established, and maintains, I think, we are among the most effective, I'd say, to my knowledge in the world.

[00:54:05] BB: And I hadn't had interaction for the past 20 odd years, so, it may not still be the case; but my impression; having some idea of what the Federation has done and is doing; that it is an unusually effective organization. In spite of the apparent schisms, OK; and I don't have a handle on the politics anymore within the organization; but I do recall the Dean of Education at Simon Fraser one time, saying, that in about my 10th to 12th year, he says, Buzza, I don't know how you manage to keep swimming with sharks without losing blood? That was his impression of the BC Teachers' Federation.

[00:54:56] KN: So, the other thing, if you'd like to comment on, is the BCTF's impact on the public education in British Columbia. What do you make of

[00:55:10] KN: that?

[00:55:48] BB: You mentioned the curriculum component before. I have really mixed feelings about centralization versus decentralization. Because, I think, in general, neither the Federation, nor the Ministry of Education, on behalf of the citizens of BC has done an adequate job of laying-out the expectations of the system in a way that could be understood by all, and agreed to by most; and then providing as much opportunity as possible, to the individual districts and, in particular, within that context, teachers, to refine and utilize it in a way, that suits them and, in particular, the people they have in front of them, in the classrooms. Because the differences are really quite profound from area to area and within sub-sets of each area. The Federation's had been influential in that regard, significantly, and, I think, for the better.

[00:56:27] KN: What is your view, or what's your take on the current state of affairs of public education in British Columbia?

[00:56:36] BB: Well, I'll tell you; in terms of the decision recently, I anticipated the result 18–20 months ago.

[00:56:55] KN: Which decision?

[00:57:14] BB: I'll elaborate. I didn't see how a subsequent government could be bound to honour the decisions of a previous one regardless of problems with those decisions from their perspective. There have to be limitations in that area. But, if you look at some of the financial

implications of earlier decisions—I remember the year that we had 17% increase in January, for teachers, saying to the Executive of the day, this is unsustainable.

[00:57:34] BB: And, of course it was. But I'm, not making the point effectively, because I don't have my own thoughts that clear in this area. It seems to me there is an outstanding challenge for the Federation to do, what it didn't do for example, for the bargaining versus professional development component. We were spending more on professional development, than we were in the bargaining arena. That certainly would not be the perception of the public or the government. So, we didn't really capitalize on the fact, that we are educators first, and primarily; and we are taking responsibility for in-service upgrading constantly.

[00:58:18] BB: And the public didn't know that we were spending money to do it. I know, the specialist associations, I think, have virtually disappeared now. But all the work that was being done there, was good solid work. And the challenge has been, I think, only partially, met—of a better job, of not only defining what we, as educators, need (in order) to do our job effectively; within a framework that we do not control; that's established as I described earlier; and given the tools to do it.

[00:58:53] BB: The other thing is that, I think, we don't do a good job of making friends in places that are powerful. And that's to our detriment. A lot of our members are active in various clubs and organizations, etc, which is great; and some of them are leaders of such groups; but if you look for close links with commercial, senior management, etc.; I think, we're under-utilizing. We're assuming we have enemies, without any basis for that assumption. And I think, we can do a better job, of using our resources and our personnel, to begin building those bridges more effectively. To a mutual benefit. If our message is as sound as we think it is; then it will be attractive to such people.

[00:59:53] BB: And, if we're not reaching out, in fact, in a way that we are meeting with them and interacting with them; that's our loss as well as theirs.

[01:00:07] KN: Wonder if you might have any advice for young teachers, who are just starting out their teaching now, in 2016. Any message, or any advice?

[01:00:25] BB: The only three examples that are close to me, are people now within the family, who trained to be teachers and aren't teachers—it was too arduous to get in, to start with. But, the advice: get involved in new teacher organizations. I think, what's happened, to some degree in the system, is that, to some degree, a lot of the volunteer work, that —and I could be wrong about this—that used to be done, isn't done to the same level, or by as good of a number of people proportionately, as was the case for a number of years. The workload is so heavy; the lack of appreciation is so little; the constant interaction between the organization and government, etc. is debilitating.

[01:01:17] BB: So it would be easy to close the door and take, you know, refuge in the cloister. And I would argue very strongly, that that's the wrong way to go, in terms of being a

professional, you have to be open about what you're doing, you have to be open to other ideas and possibilities, and get to know the staff; and work with them; and, by all means, not only get to know, but eventually, get involved in your local teacher organization.

[01:01:50] BB: You'll find, the benefits are huge. And, to live like a recluse and just do your job, and get out in a narrowly-defined would be detrimental in the long run, to you, and quite possibly, to your career. There's one other thing that just came to mind about the year that I was President. And we had a convention that year, 1967–68, in Penticton. And there was really controversial motion being put forward, by Al Blakey, and I don't know who else; possibly, Steve Norman, to in effect have an about-face with the government, based on the funding of education formula.

[01:02:42] BB: And it wasn't just based on the difference of view; but it was really based on what happened, subsequently, and it is a bit of a contradiction here, in terms of what I'm about to say. When MacFarlan and Adam Robertson agreed—you know, those two agree on something of significance, to the whole organization that was monumental in its own right, but it was time to take on the government. And that's where the separate organization was formed, so then we could retain our purity, as a BCTF organization. But, Les Petersen was the minister of education at the time, and I have a lot of respect for him,

[01:03:20] BB: he had a dual portfolio; but (he was) a reasonable kind of guy with a sense of humour. Anyhow, I let him know, that there would be this motion. And he was really upset. And he said, there's no way that we can have a vested interest group with a compulsory membership, in effect, playing a political role, overtly, intended to eliminate us, or something to that effect. So, I, that night, wrote an outline of our position, and the fundamentals were self-evident. As professionals, we have an obligation'—and it's not an option, to speak out on matters of education; and not be limited regardless of the government in power. That has nothing to do with it. It obviously, is a factor for them, and could be a factor for us. But we will continue to do so without apology. So, the Executive met that morning; and unanimously agreed to this statement. And that day, the Annual General Meeting, unanimously agreed to this statement. So, there was nothing new in it, in its own way, but it put on record, very formally, and at a critical time, our position with respect to that issue.

[01:04:53] KN: So, that would be in the AGM minutes?

[01:04:56] BB: Yes.

[01:05:00] KN: Well, I think, that, basically concludes our interview, Bob, unless you have anything...

[01:05:07] BB: Well, you never asked me what I did after retirement!

[01:05:19] KN: I did have that question—you're right! What did you do after retirement?
(everyone laughs)

[01:05:31] BB: Um, I got involved in three different areas. I became involved in governance at Douglas College; for some six years, and chaired the board there. (I was) Head of the committee that hired a new president after 25 years of Bill Day; got involved in the Advance Education Council. I had been on the Senate at UBC previously. So, that was also, post-secondary education.

[01:05:43] BB: But my sister has scleroderma, and will die from its effects. She, and four other women started the Scleroderma Association of BC in 1984, and three of the five died within two years; they were good friends; and one more died about two years ago. And Joan's condition of scarring, etc, is now inoperable. So I got involved, for the last 25 years with the scleroderma group in BC, but I also was a co-founder of a national group. And that national group, Scleroderma Society of Canada, now has the most comprehensive and largest patient database, of any in the world. There has been a transformation in terms of action for that disease in the 20-25 years I've been associated with it.

[01:06:44] BB: The other thing was, that I started doing weddings. I did 3038 weddings as a marriage commissioner, and then I have done since, three extra-legally. One of the highlights of my career as a marriage commissioner, was Larry Kuehn asking if I would perform his wedding, which I was, of course, delighted to do. The extra-legal ones were grandkids, except for a very good friend. I have one coming up August 12, in Coquitlam, at the golf club there. And that brought a lot of pleasure, but it also tied-up time, months in advance. So, I stopped doing it two – three years ago. A whole way from crack-houses, to five-star hotels, creek-beds, mountain tops, it was fascinating.

[01:07:13] KN: That's a lot of weddings!

[01:07:42] BB: That's true. Very first person was my brother Jim. He just died on July 24th, by the way. And he was a lot younger than me, 13 years younger. But he was marrying a gal from Mexico, by way of Los Angeles, and just a real sweet-heart. And he was nervous about it. He got married in my parents' living room, on my parents' 62nd anniversary, so my parents were there, my sister and her husband, my wife and me, the couple, and their dog called Kit.

[01:08:12] BB: He was so nervous during the ceremony that he sat down, sat down for the balance of the ceremony. So, that was the first of thousands. And then I golfed and played tennis and that kind of thing; so it's been a varied career. Post career.

[01:08:18] KN: An active retirement.

[01:08:25] BB: Yes. That's true.

[01:08:32] KN: Ok, anything else you wish to add?

[01:08:35] BB: No, I appreciate the opportunity.

[01:08:36] KN: Thank you very much, Bob. Have a good one.