

Interview: Jim Iker (JI)

Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)

Date: June 14, 2018

Location: Vancouver, BC

[00:00:10] KN: We're here today on the June 14th, 2018, to interview Jim Iker, Past President of the BCTF, who was President between 2013 and 2016. So, maybe we could start, Jim, by having you tell us where and when you were born, and where were you raised. Where did you grow up?

[00:00:33] JI: So, I was born in well, in Ontario, and way back in 1952, in December, and... I did my K-7 at the St. Mary's, it was a separate school, because Ontario had both public Catholic and public schools, paid for by the government. And so, I lived in Oakville, till I was about 12 or 13 years.... or, in Welland, sorry, and then I moved to Oakville...and that's where I did my Grade 8 and my High school.

[00:00:51] KN: Okay.

[00:01:10] KN: And, can you tell us a bit, Jim, about your family, you're growing up in, and were they a union family, were they a progressive family, did they talk politics, were there any recollections of that?

[00:01:21] JI: Well, my family... My Father escaped from Hungary. And, so he did not have any like for communism, and/or socialism, and so... He voted Conservative in elections, though he worked in an oil refinery, and he was a proud member of the Refinery Workers' Union. And, so he was a union member right up until about the last 8 months, before he retired. He moved up into management, and then accepted a buy-off (laughs). So, that worked out good for him. And my Mother... My Mother was religious, we actually went to church every Sunday, I was an altar boy in Welland, at the Hungarian church for a few years. And, my mother voted Liberal; and she was a... kind, passionate person. And so you know, there were these discussions of politics, especially as we got older. And, I know, my Father and I didn't agree (laughs). In terms of politics and the activities as I was... involved in, but I had a great childhood, there living in Welland we had lots of friends and... continuously playing outside; we would... rarely see our parents during the day. Because we were outside playing and... I moved to Oakville, at the right age, because it was close to Toronto, and I was able to do more things in terms of the access to Toronto.

[00:02:51] JI: Then, when I got into music, hitch-hiking to Toronto, etc. Also, really good childhood, good growing up.

[00:02:59] KN: Do you remember, Jim about your school experiences in elementary school, and in secondary school?

[00:03:06] JI: Yes I do. I had really good experiences in school. I enjoyed school, except for Grade 2. I had a very strict teacher in Grade 2, but other than that, in elementary school... probably, you know, recess and lunch were my favourites, because we got to go outside and play. And I enjoyed going into school, and going to high-school, a lot of good memories, lots of good teachers in both my elementary and high-school. You know, high-school years were probably when I started developing my own consciousness in terms of social justice issues; social issues in general, unions and... And I had some good teachers. In particular, I remember taking a Man in Society course, which was a Sociology course,

[00:04:04] JI: and we, you know, took on a lot of controversial subjects. I remember doing a paper in Grade 12 ... on the whole issue of gay rights and, it was called Homosexuals of the Day, and the riots going on and bathhouses in different parts of the states. And I wrote a paper supporting gay rights, and... had a world politics teacher, we actually studied the FLQ Manifesto, when we weren't supposed to; I thought that was pretty progressive, but... he was good because he taught us a lot about all the different "isms" in that high-school class. And having a history teacher, Mr. Fairpulton, who... one of the things I remember about him, besides that he took us to New York City and we stayed in Times Square for 3 days and had a wonderful time—he was our chaperon—and... But I remember him telling us, "Never let the school interfere with your education." And, that has stuck with me, even though I'm a teacher, but the whole world is out there and you are constantly learning in everything that you do.

[00:05:15] KN: So, where did you go to university? And, tell us a bit about your university experience. Were you engaged in student politics at the university level? And, just generally about your university years.

[00:05:30] JI: Yes, I went to McMaster University, for 4 years, I did an honours degree in Sociology, and, I did a minor in Political Science. I was very active in university; my first year was kind of a shock, because all the classes were like, 500 students and it was just... compared to my Grade 13 where you have a class of 25–30 students going into these lecture halls, so... it took me a little while to get used to that, but... I got very involved in... in the politics of the university. I was involved in the Free School movement at the time and volunteering at free schools; and free schools were these schools in the parents' house, run by parents that are volunteers; so I'd volunteered at that. And I used to volunteer with... it was boys' 8–10 year-olds in a community centre, we basically play basketball and hockey and other sports like that; and got involved in, you know, going on various picket lines with couple of my friends in Toronto, and I remember couple of them were in particular, it was [about] immigrant women. They were on strike for better conditions and better pay,

[00:06:53] JI: and we had gone to... in Toronto to those picket lines. I remember being even filmed back in the day. They had people taking pictures of that, and... In terms of school politics, being in Sociology and we actually shut down the university; and slept in the President's office, for three days. We were protesting the firing of 2 French professors and we got involved in that as Sociology students, and we... made a decision, when the police were coming in that some

people would leave, and organize on campus and some people would stay and get arrested, and I made the decision to leave' and organize, and we had a big demonstration; and... we caused the Senate to meet; and take in the student union and it ended up being a compromise in terms of settling the strike and... But what we got out of it, in the Sociology department and other departments, is we actually got a number of students to be actually on the department governance

[00:08:08] JI: society, and so, I was involved in that piece of it. I also got involved in student union elections, and was actually serving on the student parliament for one year; and I thought, wow, one year was enough for me. I've found that I really didn't want to be part of the governing structure at the time, but it was an interesting experience, though, running.

[00:08:34] JI: I had two amazing professors in particular; both sociology professors; very... very radical, very left-wing; one of them eventually got fired' and they used to tell me, "You know, Jim, what are you doing here at university?" And I would say, I am here because of you guys. In terms of learning from you, and what you have to offer in the different classes I was taking. So... yeah—anyway it was a fun. It was an exciting time, and being involved in the politics of it was pretty cool, was part of who I was and... Got involved in other boycotts as well. I remember the Farmworkers' boycott coming out of California; Involved in that and I remember there was a boycott of Kraft and I think I boycotted Kraft right up until just a few years ago (laughs). And, it was good time. Good learning experience and a good education. And, I did my ... travelled for a year after I was at McMaster, and then ended up at Dalhousie, where I did my Bachelor of Education. In 1976, and I had a great time in Halifax, it was a nice little city at the time, and the education department was pretty progressive and I was actually involved in an experimental schools.

[00:09:57] JI: So I did practicums in the public school system as well as my whole year was in... in an experimental school that was started by a professor. His curriculum; and mostly other professors kids went to this school, and I worked again, with 10 year-olds. And then I got a job in Topley.

[00:10:15] KN: Why did you become a teacher? Why did you go into education at all? Did somebody inspire you, or was there some event or something that happened that lead you into education? What was it?

[00:10:27] JI: Well, my first try was to get into social work. Probably because of my activism and... uh in university, in particular and trying to be involved in movements to try to improve life for... for people in general, but for... uhm, you know, people who were less fortunate than myself and others coming from a lower-middle class background. And so I wanted to be a social worker, and when I actually applied into Windsor, with the head of the social work department, I didn't get accepted. And then after my first year in McMaster, I applied to the school of social work in McMaster and I didn't get accepted in social work.

[00:11:15] JI: Not sure why, limited number of people, and I'm really glad now (laughs) that I didn't get accepted into social work; and I always knew that my second... This piece I wanted to do was to become a teacher. And, I knew that in Ontario at the time if you wanted to be High School teacher, you had to take 4 years of the university, where's elementary at the time you only needed 3; so I knew I wanted to keep my options open, so, I knew even at the time that I am taking my 4 years, and it happened to be an honours degree. And... I went to Dalhousie, because I was traveling; happened to be in Halifax, ran out of money, ran into a friend who was going to the social work department; knew her from McMaster; and so I applied at Dalhousie, got accepted, and

[00:12:11] JI: had a great year. It was a hard year. Because it was actually a two full courses more than I had to take in university; I had to take 3 credits in university, and Dalhousie was 42, so I was... much heavier work load, but I really enjoyed Halifax, met some cool people, lived with some neat people; and had great practicums and...

[00:12:35] KN: So, I take it that you went straight from Dalhousie to Topley, but

[00:12:40] KN: did you get that job teaching in BC right away?

[00:13:19] JI: Ah yes, because what I had done after I... graduated, I applied all over British Columbia, and all over the Maritimes. So, I wanted to be on either coast. And I did interviews up in North West Territories, I did a couple interviews in a couple of places in Nova Scotia, and then I got a call from a teacher in Topley. It was the teachers looking at all the application forms; and it was interesting, because when I sent out all my applications, I put down half on that I wanted to teach intermediate, 4-7; and the other half, I put primary. And, for Burns Lake school district, at the time, I put primary and staff was looking for male primary teacher. And, they phoned me up, asked me some questions, so I asked them... they said there was a mall in Houston—that's the big selling point. I asked if they'd pay my way out, and they just laughed at me; and they offered me the job. I had no idea where Topley was, or where Burns Lake was, but, I said, yes, and... I had a painting business going in Halifax at the time, for the summer.

[00:13:58] KN: Painting houses?

[00:13:59] JI: Painting houses! Mostly outside and inside, so that was an interesting experience. I just worked for myself. I hired somebody to help me, so I just did that through the summer, and got in my van, and drove across Canada, and, eventually showed up in Burns Lake. And my story about showing up at the board office in Burns Lake; never forget. It was around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and I showed up, and it was Barb Skillon—got to love her—after I got to know her. She was the secretary, who'd worked at the board office and I said, I am here, got a job in Topley, and she looked at me, and she said, "So, what?" So, that was my introduction, right? I said, "Okay", and made my way out to Topley and... uh, looked the school was open, there was all dark, walked around the school, and eventually met a teacher there, Helen, and asked her if she was the principal, she said, no, but she just been a long-time teacher there. And then I went to Houston and... because I needed a place to stay, and, that was Barrier. At the time

[00:15:18] JI: I was with my wife Karen, and... my first wife. And I got to Houston, I saw apartment buildings, even though they were low-rise. And I thought, what am I doing here? I'm moving to the Northern area and I'm gonna be forced to live in an apartment building? I left the city, right? So... I stuck around...

[00:15:39] JI: so...

[00:15:40] KN: So, what year was that, Jim?

[00:15:41] JI: That was in 1977. And that would have been in August, 1977. Late August when I arrived in Topley.

[00:15:48] KN: In Topley, the school was in Topley?

[00:15:51] JI: School was in Topley, my first assignment was a Grade 2/ 3 class; probably had about 180 kids in the school, eventually, we gone up to about 212 was the highest we ever had.

[00:16:06] KN: Can you talk a bit about your early years in teaching, and some of the experience that you might have had?

[00:16:12] JI: Well, I got involved in the union right away. I was our union rep, staff rep... what it was called, and, my first year in Topley was great. I had a great time; teaching was interesting experience, it was a... a little different than my BEd program, and my kind of involvement in Free Schools, and more, kind of- sense of more freedom. And going into a structured environment, and part of my background in terms of language arts was, kind of, whole language area... And then going into school that had, kind of, Bazo readers at the time. And... and... it was great, you know, it was wide cross-section of kids that year and... Which was interesting, because I had one student who, as were other students, but I remember one particular student who- the school was a safe haven for him. His name was Jimmy, and, he came to school and just sat there with the smile (laughs), tried to prod him to do some work, and sometimes he would do some work, and sometimes he wouldn't. But, you know, he came from a living in a cabin that had no running water, no electricity. And so that was an experience for me and my first few years of Topley experiencing kids that were living in basic poverty.

[00:17:47] JI: In fact, one of our teachers, teacher I met, she lived next door to the school, and she lived without running water and power as well. She was saving all her money for retirement, and she did retire about two years later, and then died... Moved to the Okanagan, and died a year after retirement, after she had been scraping by... But I had a good experience; I loved working with the kids, the school was great my first year, a lot of teachers; we got hired from all over the place. Mike was hired from Germany; Karen was from Saskatchewan, I came from Halifax; Brian was hitch-hiking through Topley and stopped, and met the principal who said, if he wanted a job; and Brian said, "Sure"! He was a teacher, so, that was the kind of environment back in the... in there. We had a great time, we all played guitars, sang songs and... we had fun, and I enjoyed teaching elementary. I taught Grade 2/3 for a while, and remember the principal

coming up to me... about 5 years later and they had a position, learning Assistance Special Ed in Kindergarten, and asked me if I wanted to do it, and I said, sure!

[00:19:06] JI: And, yeah, I became a Kindergarten teacher, and specialist teacher. And, then, my principal, we had ah... we had a good co-existence. He respected the work I did, but didn't necessarily agree with my style, and... you know and length of hair in the day, and... but he knew that whatever I was doing it was (laughs), it was working for the kids, so... But I remember him having some concerns of that in my first year of teaching in particular.

[00:19:45] KN: So, what was it like to teach Kindergarten?

[00:19:47] JI: What was it like?

[00:20:07] KN: To teach Kindergarten?

[00:20:28] JI: Oh, that's where I learned that you don't take anything for granted, on what kids know. Right to the basic of, you know, asking a child... I remember this too... to line up. Some kids had no idea what lining up meant. I remember, a child not... when I said, "Could you just put that underneath?" the table and had no idea what underneath meant. And I realized, Okay... We have to go down to the basics... with some of the students, but it was... For me it was that curriculum was wide open in terms of what I can do with the kids, and I had a... Actually it was interesting, because I... had a play-based program, but also some structure. Because I did believe in... in the kind, you know, learning numbers, some of the sounds and the alphabet and the consonants;

[00:20:49] JI: and we did that

[00:20:50] JI: through, kind of the Whole Language approach type way, and some phonetics piece in Kindergarten. I had a very supportive group of parents. Because part of my program was, I introduced downhill skiing to our school. I took my Kindergarten kids downhill skiing three times a year. That was a challenge! Going up a T-bar with the little 5 year-olds, and hanging on for your dear life (laughs), so they wouldn't fall off; and.. But we went all over the place, we had gone, you know, on the train, to the firehall, to the police, to walk around the creeks, rivers and, as much as we can go outside, we went outside and we... Used to collect herbs and... with the kids, I did that. We had a lot of different herbs growing around, and, we would pick them, and would dry them, and. But yeah, teaching Kindergarten was great. Small class-sizes at the time, and I had a lot of fun; and I did scrap-book for each student at the end of the year. And my one regret is I didn't make a scrap-book for myself (laughs), but I took the time to make one for every child in terms of all the places we went, with pictures, and some of the work that we did;

[00:22:12] JI: and that was appreciated by the parents.

[00:22:24] KN: So Jim, when you reflect upon all your years of teaching, what do you see as the greatest challenges that you faced, and also, what were the great joys that you had in the job of teaching?

[00:22:36] JI: The challenges I faced were more... at the time was political challenges, actually, in the 1980s we had... the SoCred government, and they were just passing bill after bill on teachers and... 1982, 1983 and... So, I'll get to it about the Solidarity, but I found that being the challenge that we weren't respected by governments

[00:23:06] JI: of the day. I found that more of a challenge, than I did with the actual teaching part, in the classroom. I know that I faced... remember having Grade 2/3... I think it was 2/3 class of... It started now at 39 kids. And before we had class-size limits, and I remember,

[00:23:34] JI: we were able to deal with that and about 12 of the students went to another teacher for the morning and I would get them in the afternoon, so sometimes the sizes of the classes... Back in the day we actually had a fair amount of learning assistance, even before I even became a learning assistance teacher and teacher-counsellor. And, but yeah I think, for me it was the sizes of the class, that had the number of students in them and trying to keep up with all the marking, trying and giving kids the individual attention that they needed, because that's what I... I believed in. And sometimes it was the nature of the kids... I remember one year, it was like, might have been my 5th year, not sure which year of teaching it was, but I got this... group of kids, and they started in Kindergarten, and I'm gonna use this term, whether it is appropriate or not. But, like the "Class of Hell". And, I remember, while they were in K and Grade 1, and Grade 2, and I got them in Grade 3, and... Because what they also brought in was some of the issues they were dealing with in their own neighbourhoods, trailer courts and at home.

[00:24:56] JI: Which wasn't always the best, you know, conditions for some of our students. But, it felt like it was my first year of teaching, and took me two months to get a handle on... First of all it was a large class, the students and what they were bringing in from outside; you know whether there was kind of, inter-family fights, or inter-friend fights. But took me two months before I got my. I found my ground with this particular class. And, it was fine, that we actually ended up having a great year, but it was like, wow! It was like beginning teaching! And, took two months, which is a long time, actually, So...

[00:25:40] KN: And, can you talk about the joys in teaching?

[00:25:44] JI: The joys of teaching... (sighs). I had fun teaching! So the joys would have been, you know working with the kids, not that the kids were always great, but I think, that's, for me it was... just teaching in general was exhilarating, anything... Probably one of my moments was a Grade 3 class of 15 students, and it was so good! I got that class and it was probably my lowest class-size other than Kindergarten, because in Kindergarten I had between 11 to 16 in my 4 years which was a joy. But this Grade 3 class, I remember in particular, and the amount of attention I was able to give each student, and I was able to mark every student's work before they left, and being able to.. You know, to help them, and having the time to... Remember one of my students that came in and... this is actually a joy for me, but he was... prescribed Ritalin, and... (laugh) again, whether I should have, or shouldn't have, you know, I said... I didn't agree

with kids being on drugs, and... I remember telling the mother they come off Ritalin and let's just see what happens.

[00:27:14] JI: Though I had the student in another year, who was on some form of medication, and it was actually necessary for him, and I did see that, but with this student, let's try it.. And, actually worked out with this student, the student was able to cope. So... So it definitely, that was a joy for me, but it was probably, could have been a challenge, and... today I am even thinking whether I should even be suggesting this or that, because... It was a definitely a different environment. I think the... the kids liked me, that was obvious too, and I was pretty, kind of free, laissez-faire, in terms of where they can be in the classroom. Sometimes kids would work under my desk if they wanted to, or somewhere else other than their own desk, and that was okay, and my tolerance level for noise was pretty high, as long as it was all, kind of within the structure of them working. And, not be misbehaving. Yeah, I think there was just the... the joy of the interaction with the kids and of course, and with the staff. We used to have parties for a number of years

[00:28:40] JI: with our staff. And, being able to bond as a staff and get together on a weekend—I think it was really important for all of us.

[00:28:58] KN: How large was the staff?

[00:29:16] JI: Probably the largest that we had, probably may have been 12 at one time. And, of course because it is a small town, and I was very involved in the community, like with... I am very visible, and sometimes hung around with the parents, with the kids, I could do that in Topley. I know in some places it is more difficult, and probably had more latitude; and I guess, people also were seeing that I was part of the community, went to the community hall dances,

[00:29:34] JI: which I think was important. We would play hockey, we would play ball, we played... uh.. I ran basically, up until 1986, intermural, extramural program out of our school, I did a lot of the hockey, volleyball, basketball that kind of thing, went to sports tournaments with the kids;

[00:29:58] JI: and then

[00:30:00] JI: I withdrew all that after... I just got tired of what the government was doing. And I just said, you know, enough is enough and the only sport I continued doing with my kids was floor hockey, because I really like hockey. And I wouldn't give up hockey, but... yeah... I stopped doing all the extra curricular because of the Social Credit government of the day, and... But I remember, I went to a party at one of my student's house, and of course, this was something you could do in Topley, back then, or I could do it, in particular. I remember, my student, Rick was his name, he said to his father, I heard this: "Mr. Iker is visiting like a real person!" (everyone laughs). Oh I am a real person, right? That... So, I think I broke down some barriers of... of what a teacher is, but in a really good way, and... So I think it was the interactions with parents and the community, and of course in the classroom, was part of my joys, and seeing the

difference that... that we do make, that I was making with some of the students, and then getting some of that back.

[00:31:24] JI: You know, you would get a note from a parent back about something, that was positive and you know, that's very uplifting, and....

[00:31:36] KN: Jim, you talked about... you said, that when you first came, you became a staff rep in your school, I guess that was your first step into the politics. Can you tell us about how you got involved in the local, and did you get involved in the local more so, and also, in the BCTF. When did all that happen, and how?

[00:31:54] JI: Well, you know, back in the day, and it probably still happens now, you know, you're sitting around that first staff meeting, and so, who is doing this, who's doing that, and who wants to be the staff rep? And I volunteered to be a staff rep. I mean, I was involved in that kind of activity to the last part of my high-school, and, university and I knew the importance of unions and so I volunteered to be the staff rep. So that was pretty easy and then... I went to Executive meetings and I got involved in bargaining, and quite early, even though we didn't have a lot of bargaining rights, because we weren't really a trade union we are today. We were very restricted, but I did get involved in bargaining on the bargaining teams and, kind of, as a representative from our school, I was kind of peripheral there. It was interesting too, because that was the time we had principals as part of our union, and quite often the... leadership of our local, back in the beginning, when I first started, was principals,

[00:33:04] JI: and chief negotiator was a principal, and... and... I recognized that dynamic quite early, actually, when I first got involved and... But I... you know, I appreciated the going to general meetings and I wasn't very vocal back then. I would just.. I would participate, do what I had to do, represent our staff. And, probably, the... just trying to figure out the order... of things.. But, I know I got elected to be a GR,

[00:33:46] JI: it was before we became local reps at the BCTF, it was called Geographical Representatives, and so I was the GR for our local, just for one year. And so, that was my first involvement at the

[00:34:01] JI: BCTF level.

[00:34:02] KN: Remember what year was that?

[00:34:03] JI: That was.. 1982 or... or 1983. I am just trying to put it in perspective in terms of.. when we did the solidarity strike, and...

[00:34:17] KN: That leads into my next question.

[00:34:18] JI: OK, I'll get in there.. But I was interested in being GR again, and I.. you know, I went to the Rep Assemblies and I didn't speak, or anything... You know, there was a social happening, I went to the social, met some people. But I remember our local passing a motion

and... And I'm gonna try and dig this motion up was... Because I don't remember what it was. But I remember I didn't support it at the Executive level. I didn't like it at all. And yet, they're sending it to RA (laughs). And I'm gonna have to speak on it, to introduce it. So, I went to the mic, our motion came up and I wish I could remember what it was... And, I said who I was, and I told the delegation I do not support this recommendation. I want you to know that—but I'm gonna speak to it in favour of it, because it is coming from my local. And then I spoke to it, and it got resoundly defeated.

[00:35:27] KN: Was defeated?

[00:35:28] JI: It was defeated. Resoundly defeated. It should have never been there. But then, I am going to do a kind of research on what that motion was 'cause I kind of... don't remember. And in terms of Solidarity, remember in... Remember going into some meetings in my local, my vague memory of going to some meetings, in my local on Solidarity, but I knew we were.. um... I knew what the issues were of the day, and what Bennett was doing. When it was Bennett... And, also believe if I'm not mistaken that was also the time when we were- had to... work extra minute without pay—that was part of that legislation that they were bringing down.

[00:36:18] KN: The previous year, in 1982.

[00:36:19] JI: 1982. Okay.

[00:36:21] JI: And so, it was decided that, you know, teachers, the BCTF was gonna be, if I'm not mistaken the first public sector union to go out.

[00:36:35] KN: After the GEU, who was on a legal strike.

[00:36:37] JI: Okay. BCGEU was it, so we were going out for three days and.. It was actually, it was quite the sight. That... it was actually going to happen in our local, and in my staff, because they're... The staff overall, was not very politically active, some of our teachers were conservative, and you know, they were conservative right to the very end, in terms of their teaching career. And, when we talked about it, the importance of why would we need to do it, and why would we need to support the... the issues BCGEU and us going out, and that, um... hopefully may lead into a general strike; if followed. Other unions starting coming onboard, and... we were solid. We went out. And, I remember the principal saying, to another teacher, "I never thought that Jim would be able to convince all the staff to go out". And... I did, we did. We went out, and I remember our principal actually brought his trailer out to the school for us to use. We did have a wood barrel for outside, 'cause the weather was... on the chillier side at the time,

[00:38:06] JI: and we were out for three days; we used a tent quite a lot. Our principal didn't honour, he went into school. Which was fine, but he.. he was... I was actually surprised that he... He was surprised that we would all go out, and then I was surprised that he would bring us a trailer to house us

[00:38:33] JI: during the day, which was really kind of him. But then he was a member of the BCTF, too. And, so I have to remember that, which was good. And we were out three days and I remember... I guess it was called the Kelowna Accord at the time, and I remember, Jack Munro being with Bennett in Kelowna, and... and the negotiations, and the meetings, and... and the... and then we got settled. I wasn't happy that they got settled. I was hoping for it to grow into a larger movement of the day with more other unions coming out on strike. But, nevertheless, it was settled, and... and it was a good turning point, I believe for us and our local, in terms of supporting a strike, because I don't even remember if we voted on it, or not.

[00:39:39] KN: In...

[00:39:41] KN: 60% voting yes.

[00:39:42] JI: Okay.

[00:39:43] KN: Problem spot...

[00:39:44] JI: So, it is interesting, that I don't remember, that we voted. All I know, is we're going out (laughs). So, so I don't... still I don't remember why I don't remember that we actually did vote. But I know that the outcome of that strike that I wasn't happy we settled at the time, that the outcome of what was settled, was huge for us. And, that we ended up going into negotiations after that. And that's where we got our very first seniority severance agreement.

[00:40:21] KN: Were you involved in that?

[00:40:22] JI: I was involved in part of that, in my local; and what was huge about it, is because we were only- we were restricted to only bargaining salary and benefits; and here we were... negotiating, kind of, off the side. Not sure what we even called it, whether it was a LU, or that basically structured our lay-off and recall language; and how we would do that. And, that was the lay-off and recall language that went into our collective agreement, when we negotiated in 1988 without much of a fight. 'Cause we had it and it- we ended up making some changes to it, for the better in terms of the order; but it was huge. And I.. .to- to this day- which included some severance, not a lot of severance for teachers that actually got laid-off and, eventually, fired. But, I'm not sure whether we could have got that good of the lay-off /recall in bargaining, in 1988 had we not had that. So, I recognize, as it was ground-breaking for us to actually get seniority language into the collective agreement.

[00:41:41] KN: Okay—so, moving along a few years later, in 1987, the... Social Credit premier, Bill Vander Zalm; brought in Bills 19 and 20. And, teachers participated now in one-day protest on April 28th and then, later joined in the BC FED general strike on June the 1st, that same year. Do you remember Bills 19 and 20 and if you do, what were your thoughts about what was happening at the time?

[00:42:13] JI: Well, I remember the bills, and again, my first reaction, you know, other than, the content of the bills, one of them, trying to create a regulatory body, for us and trying to separate

the union from the so-called profession of teachers, and the... Other bill, that, which ended up being huge for us, but didn't like the aspect of that, you know, where we became a trade union, but where we had to choose in terms of... which I found strange—whether we wanted to be a trade union, or whether we wanted to stay as association

[00:42:58] JI: with no rights. But, again, the first reaction was that here, this government is passing another bill. On teachers. And, I'm going to raise this, because... I recall previous to this, and I didn't think it was part of this—previous to this, we went on a work-to-rule, and... Not sure, if all the BCTF locals went in on a work-to-rule, or not... Don't remember what it was, but I do remember us in Topley going to work for 9, or 8:45 and leaving at 3:15.

[00:43:14] KN: We did go out on a work-to-rule that year.

[00:43:30] JI: That was part of the...

[00:43:46] KN: Part of the job action.

[00:44:02] JI: Part of the job action... So, I... yeah, that's the part I also remember well. I couldn't decide whether it was part of this job action that we actually went on this work-to-rule and... It was a successful work-to-rule for us. Our teachers liked the idea that they showed up 15 minutes before, and left 15 minutes after. They did, and I remember... we had a study session on one of the days;

[00:44:19] JI: in Burns Lake, where we spent time analyzing the bills, and what it meant; and how we were gonna move forward, and... You know, and... I mean, the other piece on the College of Teachers in the day, where part of it was that they were gonna try to, you know, take professional development away from the union. That would have been—that was part of the responsibilities that the College would have, eh? So, it was huge, but again, as we all do, we organize, and then we... we make it our own. We do what we need to do, to make it work, and really, that's what we ended up doing with both bills, in terms of the College, and in terms of us becoming a trade union. I remember the meeting at the... what was it. the PNE Agrodome—that the BCTF had to decide what kind of union we were gonna become, whether it was gonna be a... union of just like, all those people that chose to be a trade union; through bill 19.

[00:45:35] JI: Or whether we... be a union where you gonna fit a local who decided to remain an association, they'd still be part of the BCTF? And, yeah.. I remember that meeting in the Agrodome, and all the debates back and forth on that one. And I remember the... the drive in our local to sign up member as well.

[00:46:03] KN: The certification sign-up?

[00:46:04] JI: The Certification sign-up.

[00:46:07] KN: How did that go in your local?

[00:46:08] JI: It went really, really well in our local and I'm just trying to... I believe, every one of our members signed up... And, I remember that there was a couple hold-outs, and one of them in particular was the Secretary Treasurer.

[00:46:32] KN: Of the local?

[00:46:56] JI: No, of the district. Who- I actually, said to him: "You need to sign up, because you're never gonna become an administrator!" And he signed-up (laughter). And, I remember that, and he's used... he used the union many times for support over his teaching career, as well as my personal support over the years, too. And so, yeah, it was successful drive and every one of our locals... signed up to be a union. So, it was historic for us. And, you know, we can thank the government of the day...

[00:47:21] KN: So, when did you become Local President? And how long were you Local President?

[00:47:26] JI: So, I became local president in 1990. I was chief- I was bargainer, Chief Negotiator in 1988, when the first contract became....

[00:47:35] KN: Can you talk about that for a minute?

[00:47:37] JI: Yeah.. So, When we went in to bargaining, and it was... we did the five-day training, BCTF offered. It was a great five-day training, it was one of the best trainings that I've ever had to go into negotiations, and I remember that. We did the five-day training, and then coming back into our local, and spending few days writing language, using some of the model language and just writing our own language as well, and spending days and then going into the bargaining table to... bargain that language. And it... and it.. took a number of months to get our first union contract; we were able to get that union contract. I think, we had an overall support of... the superintendent, so we had a lot of uniquely-written, Burns Lake language because of our Superintendent, and it was the Secretary-Treasurer of the day who also was the bargainer. So, that was an interesting experience, and... I was the... Got elected President in 1990, also, Chief Negotiator; negotiated the 1990 contract, and I also negotiated our 1993 contract as well. So, as, president...

[00:49:01] KN: Can you talk about your early years as president of your local? Did you do primarily bargaining, and stuff?

[00:49:04] JI: Ah... well,

[00:49:07] JI: as president, what was as.. I was bargaining as president, I used to... meet- I was part-time president,

[00:49:17] KN: Okay.

[00:49:18] JI: At the time the Federation, we didn't have full-time presidents in terms of the support. Though, that came over time, that became a sliding scale in terms of how much release time you can get at the BCTF that support you, but I was a part-time president for a number of years, and I actually liked being part-time. I was about 0.5 in the classroom, and 0.5 local president, and I liked the aspect of being in the classroom, as well as being president and... I mean, there were times when I had to take time away from my teaching in terms of president work, or bargaining work, and I remember... this was, kind of sad for me, as I was teaching Kindergarten, and I'd been away a lot in negotiations, and one of my kids coming up to me and saying, "Mr. Iker, are you gonna be our teacher today?" (laughs) And I realized, well... I haven't been around a lot, hey? And, it is all... I'll never forget that. I said, "Well, I am your teacher, right?" I think they were finding it hard to distinguish.. So, yeah, I was a part-time president, enjoyed my time doing that in a part-time way, of course,

[00:50:33] JI: most often it was more than... more than part time. And probably, one of the... the most memorable was the... As president... I was, when our school board banned the Impressions Reading series. And they... they banned the reading series, because there was kind of a Christian movement from Southern part, from Frances Lake area, and there was a lot of stuff coming out of the USA, that Impressions Readings series kind of invoked, kind of anti-religious Devil Worship, and... this kind of stuff. And so, our school board, they... banned the Impressions Reading series, and we took it to grievance, we took it to arbitration; it broke families, it broke communities; we were featured on W5. Our parents in Topley actually took on a court action on that one; and eventually, we got a good settlement, we ended up doing, kind of a mediation art on that one. But I do... I do remember that- I remember the support of the Federation, and Randy Noonan being our lawyer at the time. That was a huge professional autonomy grievance. We had a good professional autonomy language and that's... what we used, and... I enjoyed being President of a small local, because I was able to get to every school all the time.

[00:52:11] JI: And, you know, that's when you got to meet the teachers, was at recess and lunch time, and... It was so interesting. You go into school and you talk with the members, and the member will come up to you and say to you, "I'm sorry to bother you; I don't want to bother you with this" (laughing). So, that's what I am here for, right? But they... some of them were like they didn't want to intrude. Even though, that's why I was.. was there, but... I enjoyed being president, I enjoyed working for the members; make sure the collective agreement was being followed, and we had fairly good relationships with the school district.

[00:52:55] KN: Have you ever gone on strike?

[00:52:57] JI: We took a couple strike votes, we didn't have to go out on a strike; the one time in the... would have been the first round... We did take a strike vote, and we threatened it, and I remember this Superintendent saying to me, "Well, Jim if you'd go out on strike, I'm gonna keep you out for two weeks" or something. And I just went back at him, and I said, "Well, if we go out on strike, I think we're out a month. Okay?" (laughs). It went, you know, also, back and forth; and then there was just that time you came up to that meeting, when we were taking a strike

vote. And, I know you, when you spoke, you turned it around. Because we had a number of people speaking why we shouldn't be supporting a strike vote at the time, and you also spoke; and a number of other teachers started to speak up. But, I do remember that... that you were instrumental in how we all did turn that around. Which actually, surprised me, because we were fairly out there in terms of... of... being there when the union needed the members. But, we fortunately never had to... to go on strike.

[00:54:15] KN: A couple of questions: how long were you president, Jim?

[00:54:18] JI: I was president of our local probably for... Oh, wow...1990 all the way to... two-s... 2006. With a couple of breaks.

[00:54:43] KN: Okay... Were you president when the amalgamation hit?

[00:54:47] JI: I was president when our school district was amalgamated.

[00:54:51] KN: And you were amalgamated with Nechako Lakes?

[00:54:53] JI: Nechako, yes, with Vandehoof. School district 56. And, we fought that amalgamation... We didn't support amalgamation at all, tried to get BCTF behind it... and I remember the President of the day telling me to write a letter to government (laughs) and she would send it (laughs). I thought, that strange, I wrote a letter to her, and I sent it to Alice; and I said, "Hey, Alice, here's your letter on why we don't; support amalgamation. I hope you send it off". I have no idea whether she sent it off, or not, but that's what she told me (laughs). And...

[00:55:31] KN: Oh and that was Alice McQuade?

[00:55:33] JI: Alice McQuade, yes. Loved Alice. And, we.. we tried.. I know the BCTF set a process of- because we had a By-law 3.4 that told us since school districts amalgamate, that you need to amalgamate, and we actually had a number of meetings with the our sister-local, to try to actually amalgamate, and those...

[00:55:59] KN: They were the large local, right?

[00:56:26] JI: They were the larger local. And we sat down to work out issues between us, in a very... we actually tried very hard. And we figured that is we were a new local, we wanted the office to be in the central to the district, we wanted the office to be in Fraser Lake, and we wanted to be able to alternate presidents. One year, from Burns Lake or two years from Burns, two from Nechako. If the president was Burns Lake, the Vice-president will be Nechako, that kind of thing. And, we weren't successful. I remember the bargaining staff person of the day came up, Mavis Lowry, to help us... amalgamate, then our Federation lawyer came up, just before the hammer was gonna happen on us. David Yorke came up, to help us work through out amalgamation difficulties, and we still didn't..

[00:56:53] JI: Couldn't come together on what the new union would look like; and then we were able to... pass motions at the Annual General Meeting that put off the amalgamation of our local.

[00:57:06] KN: Could you talk about that for a minute? What exactly happened?

[00:57:10] JI: Well, we... because also, we were going into provincial bargaining, we were in provincial bargaining. As well. And, so, at that Annual General Meeting, a number of local reps, presidents such as myself; we got together to organize and a lot of these locals that were the locals, affected by the By-law 3.4; that we had to amalgamate and so, we weren't supportive of the by-law that we had to amalgamate. Especially when... if two locals didn't want to, or they tried and they couldn't, even though some did, we basically organized at that Annual General Meeting, a way to try to delay the amalgamation. And we talked to other locals about the support, and why we wanted to delay it; and why we thought at the time it wasn't good for us, or good for the Federation. And so, through organizing at the Annual General Meeting, you know, we... crafted the motion that was put forward, that would... I believe the first motion was, it would delay the amalgamation until there was a provincial- a true provincial agreement. And, we were successful at the AGM passing that motion; we weren't successful in changing the by-law, 'cause the by-law needed 75%. But, motion stood and that put off the amalgamation.

[00:58:51] JI: At the next AGM, we, again, organized, and crafted another motion that would put off amalgamation again; and that was passed by the Annual General Meeting. By-law 3.4; we tried to organize to pass that; it failed, it didn't get the 75%; then eventually the Federation had a Governance Committee, and the Governance Committee made some recommendations; and there was a lot of back and forth with locals and individual members of the locals; on how we could craft a, kind of compromise motion on by-law 3.4. That crossed a lot of locals; even some locals that didn't necessarily support that locals should stay separate; and eventually, we got the change to By-law 3.4, which kind of came out of that Governance Committee recommendations. And then, because we got the by-law changed, and there was no more need, and it was in our school district. And we also fought school district amalgamation. Tried to fight it with BCTF's help; we tried to do it on our own, and tried to get the various First Nations

[01:00:16] JI: bands

[01:00:17] JI: onboard; but then we had one point where we thought that the Government has changed their mind. We had a cabinet minister of the Day, Jackie Pement, of the NDP government of the day, who was a trustee. We appealed to her on two different times went to two different meetings with her; to try to change the government mind on amalgamation. And, we couldn't. And when our school district amalgamated, that's when our locals said, that to me, 'cause I was president, and then running—that you have to go 100% full-time. And so, that's why I became a full-time president, as opposed to part-time president. So that would have been 1997–98 year. And we're still a separate local, there we have an umbrella organization as our

bargaining agent, Burns Lake and district and Nechako Teachers' Union. That's our umbrella organization; and our two locals they work well together to this day.

[01:01:23] KN: Okay. So, uhm; you had alluded earlier in your comments, the fact that we now had provincial bargaining brought in in 1994 by an NDP government... By 1998, during the second round of our bargaining on the provincial level, were you on the bargaining team?

[01:01:43] JI: Yes, I was on the bargaining team that year as well...

[01:01:46] KN: Can you tell us a bit about that round of negotiations?

[01:01:50] KN: You were on the provincial bargaining team of the BCTF bargaining, right?

[01:01:53] JI: I was on the provincial bargaining team for BCTF both, in the 1994–95 round, as well as the 1998–99 round.

[01:01:58] KN: Okay.

[01:02:00] JI: And, the 1998 round, as in all rounds we have had high hopes in terms of trying to negotiate a provincial agreement; we have a number of items on the table, that we wanted to be able to negotiate; improvements and... As well as to get into the collective agreement the class-size, class composition, non-enrolling ratios; salary increases, we had a whole wide range... of objectives... that we wanted to negotiate. But, as we tried to... the government of the day also had a zero-zero-two mandate; and, so of course, there were some restrictions around our bargaining. We knew that provincial bargaining wasn't working well, that...

[01:02:51] JI: because the employer came to the table even in.... I mean, this is the employer under an NDP government, that created provincial bargaining, created BCPSEA, and what we faced at the table in provincial bargaining, always was concessions. And so, our objective was to make improvements; and where we did get provincial language, we would have red-circling. We'd have superior provisions. Bargaining wasn't going well with the employer, government was getting involved; the whole public sector was bargaining; at that time, and... Don't know if you- I think you probably remember this, but bargaining broke down, with the employer/ government, and we were at the BCTF sitting around; a number of people, a number of staff; including yourself, and we were actually, kind of... looking at next steps. And next steps also being, job action, that we were actually even gonna possibly talk about job action. And, there was a phone call. And the president of the day received a phone call, that the negotiations were back on, because government could not get an agreement with any of the other public sector unions on that zero-zero-two aspect; so we went back into bargaining;

[01:04:32] JI: eventually we were just bargaining with... the... government representatives of the day. I remember that round, and this was probably, the hardest part for me... Going to an Annual General Meeting, and talking about- and there- was kind of a- there was a black-out. There was an agreement that we wouldn't talk about specifics about bargaining. Because we're going to bargain directly with the government. So, there was not a lot of information we could-

we could give, but I remember at that AGM, it was very uncomfortable. But I did nothing. I was... on the bargaining team, and... talking about bargaining and talking about... what members thought was still on the table, in terms of, in particular, on class composition and special education and some other issues, and... those things weren't on the table anymore. But members thought they were on the table. And we didn't indicate them in any way, that some of these things were off the table. At all. That was hard. That was very hard... for me. We bargained directly with government, remember we bargained with Russ Pratt, Tony Penikett, Don Avison, and there was also a woman out there that came to the table, I don't remember her name.

[01:06:18] JI: And, there is only a... number of issues, left. I mean... The big issue... was.. class-size and non-enrolling ratios; that was on the table. Government had a specific limit of money, which was shown to us a lot earlier in bargaining; they weren't gonna go over, plus the zero-zero-two; and... the TTOC- we had some TTOC issues on that table and a couple of other things on that table. What I remember about the meeting with Avison and Penikett, and Pratt... was we came to the table with all these binders; and all this material, and Brian Porter pulling all this... stuff. And we hit the wall, all of us at the table, and all Russ Prat had was a piece of paper (laughs). And we would go back and forth; and we would talk. And I remember one meeting; where- and Russ would keep it in his back- pocket. And I remember one meeting where he came... "So, where were we?" And he went to look at his back pocket, this piece of paper was in there. "Oh, I don't have my piece of paper! Remind me what we've been doing?" (laughs) I thought it...

[01:07:35] JI: I mean it was very frustrating, knowing how organized and prepared we were, but I also though, this is brilliant. What this government, Brian is their chief negotiator, or whatever they want to call him that day, and the role that he was playing. And I remember us telling them about, "You gotta do something about BCPSEA". "Don't worry. Don't worry about BC PSEA; we'll.. Government will deal with BCPSEA". Government never dealt with BCPSEA, still hasn't. But we were still involved in it as a team, and then, eventually, we weren't involved in the bargain as a team, and... the President of the day was involved in the bargain, and the staff person, and... I believe our chief negotiator was still at that table on that... uhm.. And, eventually, there was back and forth on class-size, I remember one of the class-size... agreements got rejected by the Executive thankfully, 'cause it wasn't good enough. I also remember when we were actually working on...uh... the amount of money that was being negotiated for class-size limits and ratios I remember we were all back into Federation staff, and team, and... we're working the numbers to try to fit in the... to fit in how the money would last over 2 years and how we could improve the primary classes,

[01:09:09] JI: and how we can do a little... So we work within that...amount of money we worked kind of, backwards, on what locals had now; where we could make the improvements. So, that was an interesting exercise to... go through.. to determine what those numbers ended up being, and what the primary class-size limits were. And, of course, crucial that there would be superior provisions would be protected. And, that the... the negative thing is that round of bargaining, I know, a lot of people called it the back-room deal; and... and it went out there because there

was so much information, that wasn't going out to the activists, not to members. Because everything was happening behind the closed doors. And so, that was the... the thinking of a lot of people at the time, back-door... back-room negotiations happening, and some of that was back-room negotiations. 'Cause the team wasn't involved and... in that aspect of it at all, so I think, that was..... that part was very tainted. What was interesting, is when we did get the deal and we went around as a team, and I remember the team... spoke whether they supported it in terms of a recommendation to the...Executive, and ultimately, the Executive was gonna decide whether there was a deal or not,

[01:10:42] JI: and ... I appreciated that each member of the team spoke on... whether they could support the deal, or not support the deal. And I didn't support the deal of the day at the time. I didn't support the deal, and I was clear and... to the bargaining team and to others; that I didn't support the deal, because we didn't... make an honest effort. I believed in trying to improve the salary. And so, because we didn't actually try to improve, or try to break that "zero-zero-two" thing, although we got to the "two" moved to April, about three months earlier, which was different than the other public sector unions; that we didn't give it a good try; and so I... I voted no as a member of the bargaining team. I think, the vote was 4:3. If I'm not mistaken.

[01:11:39] KN: Against?

[01:11:41] JI: 4 in favour of recommending, and three against... So, that was an important part of the bargaining team to be able to say "Yay" or "Nay", and ultimately the Executive would make the decision.

[01:12:00] KN: And then they...

[01:12:19] JI: And, the Executive... You know, we ratified the deal. And... and that was the language, amongst other language, that... ended up being stripped. And who would have known at the time, 'cause there wasn't a good feeling about this deal, but who would have known at the time, that this was actually, the only improvement in class-size and non-enrolling ratios we would get for the next 20 years, and we still haven't improved the figures, We're now just going back to bargaining and finally, we might be able to try to improve it. Who would have known back then?

[01:12:39] KN: Okay, Jim, you... alluded to the contract stripping in 2002. Can you remember... your reaction when you heard about that contract stripping and that legislation, can you tell us how you felt about it?

[01:12:57] JI: I was in my office; I was... I believe it was a Friday afternoon when I got the phone call, that the government had introduced Bills 27, 28 into the house that was going to... first of all, vaporise the Burns Lake collective agreement and they impose the Nechako Teachers' Union agreement on us, and then... As well as strip of all class-size, class composition, ratios, working... conditions language; certain conditions out of our collective agreement. I remember that phone call, and I just remember being stunned. Tears. I couldn't believe it. 'Cause we had worked so

hard to take that far our contract, and I think it was the use of the vaporization of our collective agreement, has hit me the hardest.

[01:13:55] KN: Can you explain the concept of vaporization?

[01:13:58] JI: Oh, vaporize... It is a term I use when the government totally stripped or ripped up our contract in Burns Lake. That was part of our identity, we were already an amalgamated school district, where we lost our schools district; and now we were losing our own collective agreement and our members, and myself. We all fought hard for and negotiated it, and that the government with the stroke of a pen could just say, "You no longer have a collective agreement in place. And now we're gonna give you another collective agreement" So, that's what I mean by vaporize... That's

[01:14:40] JI: the terms that I've used in...

[01:14:42] KN: And this agreement was for your local and the newly amalgamated district?

[01:14:44] JI: Yes so, they imposed the Nechako Teachers Union, which was an inferior collective agreement. Our collective agreement had... it had much- uh, more.. working conditions, and better class-size limits from K to 12 in it, as well as salary, benefits, a number of managers' right issues, that we had; and seniority, post and fill, and a number of... A whole host of contract language that we had negotiated with our school district. So... It- I took it really hard and remember phoning... one of our members, who is on our Executive, to let her know about it, and so, also phoning- my wife Cheryl about it, and, just ... I- I just couldn't believe it. Like I said, I couldn't... Like I said, I actually broke down in tears, as this was happening, and... My hope there was, that we were gonna be able to stop it in some way, or fight it, in some way, but it was a... a very dark moment. For me. In particular, on that day.

[01:16:07] KN: And was there, in Topley, a one-day protest by the BCTF? Did your local participate in that?

[01:16:13] JI: We participated in that one-day protest, I remember well, because, the protest was in Smithers. And I was the one... who was going to speak at that rally. And, it was like minus 35 outside,

[01:16:39] JI: and I woke up to a news announcement that the bridge that our bus was supposed to go through in Houston... a contractor in Houston had been kind of a illegally driving and had a huge skid and crashed into the bridge, which knocked it out of commission. And, I am thinking, Oh my God! (laughs). There is a conspiracy against us here. And, so we hopped on two buses, and luckily, our bus driver... knew how to navigate some of the off-roads to go around the bridge. And we were able to get to Smithers. We were a bit late, 'cause of that work-around took us a while to get there. But, we went and had our rally in front of... our MLA, Dennis McKay's office that day, and teachers were there, CUPE was there, community supporters were there. It was cold... (laughs) It was cooold! And, yeah, we had our rally. I spoke at our rally and

then we left all our placards, etc., in front of the MLA's office. MLA's office was not... did not open that day, did not show up and, that was our day of protest, or day one. I was hoping that there would have been more substantial continued activity, than just the one-day strike;

[01:18:24] JI: I remember thinking that, what I wanted to do was take our local out on what would have been a classified, I guess, there is a wild-cat strike, and being... talked down by a couple of our members— Executive members—and talking about it, and we decided not to do it. And, I don't have very many regrets in my life and that's always been one of my regrets, that we didn't take more substantial action. Even if we had to do it alone... Which I am sure we wouldn't have... Other locals I am sure would have joined in, who had their contracts vaporized. And hoping, that... That there would be more action overall in the labour movement. And, I know we wanted to... put in a challenge to- forget the terminology now, to, to try to put...

[01:19:32] KN: A complaint?

[01:19:34] JI: A complaint, but to try to put it on hold...

[01:19:39] KN: Injunction?

[01:19:40] JI: Kind of, like an injunction. From it happening until there could be a... a hearing, or a court case, or something more. As, a temporary injunction. Even, hoping that it can be stopped, or something can be changed to, at least. If they're gonna vaporize our collective agreement, then give the options to the parties to sit down and actually negotiate an amalgamated agreement. That would have been my second choice, that if we were gonna lose it, then we should be able to sit down and negotiate a new contract. But that never came to be. The advice of the day at the BCTF was, that seeking injunction would not be successful, and instead we went the route to challenge the legislation, as we know, and ours was on hold pending HEU's challenge, nurses', healthcare challenge, so... But, yeah, it was a dark day and I don't think, that we all realized the impact of... complete impact of the stripping of the collective agreements in terms of our working and learning conditions, class-size provisions in particular, because it was...The actual impact didn't happen until July 1st, 2002.

[01:21:11] JI: And we never... I don't... anticipated that along with the stripping would be, you know the stripping of funding, etc. for 16 years by the BC Liberal government of the day.

[01:21:28] KN: So, Jim, when did you first get elected to the BCTF Executive?

[01:21:33] JI: I was first elected in 2002, I believe. I was a Member at Large for 5 years. And it was interesting, because I had been approached for a number of years previous to... if I wanted to run for the Executive. And I remember, saying, never say never. And I remember telling the individual, I would never run for the BCT Executive. I think. I was thinking it was just like... thankless work, or... And, but, things change, and the environment was changing, and I thought that I had already been involved with the BCTF at the provincial level, with provincial bargaining. I was part of the legislative team, that met with the NDP government of the day to try to

persuade them not to do provincial bargaining, or to persuade them, that is you're going to do it, these are the things we wanted to do; and... Being active provincially in a number of ways; and so, when the opportunity came in 2002, I ran, and...

[01:22:44] KI: So you were on the Executive when the 2005 strike happened?

[01:22:47] JI: Yes, I was.

[01:22:48] KN: So, what do you remember about that experience?

[01:22:53] JI: I remember that very well in terms of the number of strike votes we ended up taking. Here was another example: bargaining had been going on for... over a year, again, and it... you know, wasn't going anywhere and then this government again, out of nowhere... We were just getting ready actually to go on a... phased action. Job action. Similar to what we had done in 2001, withdrawing different activities and supervision, etc. And then the government brings down Bill 12. Basically, legislating the agreement of zero and zero, and... and nothing else. And so, we definitely, escalated the action. I think we had a four sets of votes, I believe through that round. One was on the phased action, and then authorizing a full-scale strike. And we went on this... I'd say, a very successful 10-day, I guess, some people may call it illegal strike (

[01:24:11] JI: laughs) of the day.

[01:24:12] JI: And I remember being involved in very many meetings at the Executive level, and I also remember well, that I was... Jinny's chauffer quite often. And I would chauffer Jinny around who was our President of the day.

[01:24:29] KN: Jinny Sims?

[01:24:30] JI: Jinny Sims. To different meetings. And one of them, I remember well, because we... I picked her up around 4 in the morning, and back in that day early mornings were not a strong suit of mine. But I picked her up, and, because she had a CBC interview... out of Toronto. So it was like 3 hours before... And, also we had a... a reporter from the Globe and Mail that was gonna be following Jinny around that day. So, we're off to CBC and... And talking to the reporter, and Jinny does her thing on CBC, and then, when she leaves CBC there's I think, I believe... She ended up doing two different CBCs, if I'm not mistaken, and we leaving CBC, there's a CTV reporter outside and so, she does the CTV interview, and then we end up with the reporter, end up going back into the building. I remember another time, of the driving her to another rally and... We were driving and we saw a student rally happening. It was students on the corner of Granville and Broadway, all four corners, students with pro-teacher anti-government settlement signs, etc.

[01:26:02] JI: So, we saw this and Jinny said, "Oh, we gotta park! I gotta stop and talk with the students!" So, we found a... I let Jinny off and I found a parking spot in a parking- underground parking lot. And, parked and, you know, went up to the street, and... we talked to some students, etc., and then we were going back into the parking lot, and I couldn't find the car

(laughs). I didn't remember... I thought I remembered what stall we parked, so we walked around for a while looking for it- for the car. So, there was that humorous moment. I remember walking around with Jinny again at the huge rally, that the Fed, BC Federation of Labour organized for us in Victoria, and they- some unions actually went out for the day, and participated, the CTF presidents... were with us, many of the presidents from the CTF representing other provinces across Canada came out to that rally to speak and... I remember walking around with Jinny as she did most of the talking with members. So, that's one of my memories being Jinny Sims' chauffeur on top of being and going to picket lines myself as an Executive member;

[01:27:33] JI: and... going to endless meetings of the Executive about the strike. And then when we went into the mediation with Vince Ready, I remember the Executive dealing with that piece, and... And also, knowing that there's this... pending court actions

[01:27:59] JI: and the fact that we couldn't pay- we couldn't give out any money at all, our books were, kind of, almost seized and it all- you know, people in our building looking at our books, making sure we weren't disbursing any money. So it was a great moment, it was a great strike, it was really neat; the members were all... were solid on the lines everywhere. And the one part for me- I am gonna call it, a sad part, was that I wasn't able to go up into my own local; and spend time on... our picket lines. Though, I did go and visit a couple picket lines up North, 'cause I was, I think, I was allowed to go home for one day and I did visit picket lines up North,

[01:28:49] JI: but...

[01:28:50] JI: Not being able to participate in my own picket lines, but... being immersed into the strike totally here at this level. And then I also remember the, you know, decision we had to make about whether we end the strike, or not. And that was not an easy decision to make. Whether we end the strike, because we were... basically, the court- the judge who had been very kind to us, was, I think, might have got a little heavier, we were now back to work Monday, so the decision was, well, do we end this strike now, or do we wait another couple of days, and... We had a lot of deep frank talks at the Executive about to end it or not. We'd put it to a vote and I believe it was the 7 to 4 vote to end the strike. And then we, as Executive members, we went off and did a tour. I think, I spoke at 6 general meetings in 2 days, along the Highway 16 and Highway 97; and going to general meetings to talk about why we should end the strike. And, when we had these votes, in two days,

[01:30:04] JI: and I had some- I wasn't feeling well and I had, our Vice-President drove me to all those locals, and... I spoke, and... We got a settlement, strike was over and I think it was a successful strike, it was needed; and of course, one of the issues was not to let- the legal- not let us being legislated back to work, but we weren't able to deal with... class-size and class composition; thought we knew it was illegal to negotiate, but that also didn't stop us in trying to negotiate something, that's right for our members and students.

[01:30:41] KN: So, Jim you became a Full-time Table Officer in 2007, when you became the 2nd Vice-President.

[01:30:47] JI: Yes, I did.

[01:30:48] KN: And you were a full-time table officer for 6 years before you became president.

[01:30:53] JI: Yes.

[01:30:57] KN: In 2013. Is there anything in those 6 years that sort of stands out in your mind that you wish to talk about?

[01:31:02] JI: It was a... well, learning years for me, as a table officer, of full-time release. Probably, what stands out the most for me, would have been, the... again, I had to do it, was bargaining. The 2011 round of bargaining, when we went on job action and... the round that Susan coined as "The Year of Joyful Teaching" because we were on, again, a phased actions, where we withdrew the supervision and meetings with administration amongst a number of other things, report cards, but continued to meet with parents and teach. And, again, we were... you know we tried to negotiate in good faith an agreement, and then... That's when government again, legislated us and... legislated the... that mediation process with Jago. And, there was also... the year that we got the... during my time as the Vice-president, we got our first decision; from Justice Griffin, that vindicated us for what we always knew, that what the government had done, had violated our constitutional rights, that was illegal. And that decision had come down 2011, and that was ... a very joyous moment that, again shows the strength of our members and the strength of our organization, that we... we don't give up when something's been wronged, when some things been done wrong to all of us.

[01:33:12] JI: And, when Justice Griffin came out with her decision, that said what government had done was violated... it was illegal; and there was such a huge victory at the time, but gave government one year to rectify the situation, so that was a strong memory winning our court case for the first time.

[01:33:36] KN: And when did it happen again, the second time?

[01:33:39] JI: The second time it... well, we went back to court because what government did—it was part of that round of bargaining—is, that they legislated the same illegal language into the new bill; and continued the extension of our inability to negotiate class-size again, illegally, in that round of bargaining... And, then, so we went back to court again. And, we were successful again, and that decision came out on, if I'm not mistaken, January 28, 2000-and...14.

[01:34:29] KN: So, by then you were President?

[01:34:30] JI: Yeah, I was President. I remember doing a press release in the morning- a news conference in the morning; about the stripping of the collective agreement, and we were recognising the January 28th that day, and talking about the need to, you know to put in funding

and... class-size, class composition, and... finishing the news conference, and finding all around 11 o'clock, after I came out of the news conference, that Justice Griffin has just issued the- her second decision, again, upholding our constitutional rights. And... saying, that what government had done, was illegal, and that in fact, they went further, that they had tried to provoke us into a strike, and saying that they had been in bad-faith bargaining. And it was so huge, so ecstatic, and we had to go into another news conference that afternoon, to talk about, to celebrate our victory, but not to... not to what's the word...

[01:35:45] JI: I can't think of the word, but just to kind of, be matter-of-fact. We were... just beaming, when we heard that we had won, and... and, you know going into a news conference and just to... talk about that and what it meant, but not rubbing dirt in anybody's face in terms of the government. And then going back to the bargaining table, the next day, as well.

[01:36:11] KN: So, what happened in that round of bargaining, which you were President? What were you trying to do and what was... going on at the bargaining table?

[01:36:22] JI: Well, again, it... was.. I was gonna say, it was gonna be like any other round of bargaining, except what was different in that round of bargaining, is that we had made an agreement with BCPSEA back in December, January of 2012–2013 about trying to do bargaining a little different. And, so we made an agreement, and... with BCPSEA, which was ratified by both parties in January, that we would... go onto bargaining and have a facilitator at the table, Mark Brown. That we agreed to... amend the split of issues, and we moved some things from the local table to the provincial table, like, post and fill, which was probably the most significant provision to go, move locally. And we also agreed that we would have a... a committee to look at our claims on salary. And, exactly how far are we behind from other provinces, and that we would open early— and that we would have all our objectives put down at a certain time, early in bargaining. And so, is actually pretty historic, and we went into that round of bargaining, I believe with some hope, except... I'll get to the except part.

[01:37:55] JI: And that we also agreed that... both parties would not go into the media to talk about bargaining, but that we would inform our members, we would put out our bargaining bulletin, but they would be put on our own portals, only, uhm, available to our members, and that we, both sides wouldn't go to

[01:38:20] JI: the media. But, that we reserved our right to go to the media to talk about underfunding. And, importance of class-size, class composition, whatever that we normally advocate for against government. So, we weren't gonna give that up. So, we went into bargaining, some people didn't even know we were bargaining, it became too quiet there for... a while, and... with the, you know with the help of Mark Brown... But, what also, was part of that round, is they... that was when Christy Clark came out with her... she wants to negotiate a 10— year agreement with the teachers, and also there was a... the other public sector had just come off of a.. basically a round of bargaining where was... it was two-and twos. And, so we were into this... this phase... And, we bargained, but then, very quickly it seemed like BCPSEA had no room

to move for bargaining, and... the Liberal government was re-elected, in May 2013, which... and come June of...

[01:39:57] JI: just trying to get all my dates together here, because what ended-up happening, is government in that round of bargaining ended up firing the BC PSEA chief negotiator and some of the bargaining team that they had, and they hired their own... chief negotiator, Peter Cameron. And so what we ended up having to face was a government that had a ... that was, there was a settlement already out there of 5.5%, 5-year agreements. And so, what we were facing from the government and from the employer was a very restrictive mandate, as well as another contract stripping agenda that they had, and they had a number of concessions on the table. It seemed like every round of bargaining we face... we were facing concessions. And there is... important concessions on the table, like they wanted to negate our working conditions language that we won back in our court-case in 2011, 'cause that was part of what Justice Griffin gave back to us. And here they wanted to strip it off the table again. But they didn't challenge her decision in 2011. And, also there were some other significant concessions on evaluation and harassment language that government

[01:41:29] JI: wanted.

[01:41:53] JI: And then, of course, the whole issue became about as well as the...bill to negotiate class-size and class comp improve the non-enrolling rations, and when we won the court-case, then all the...We had to deal with, you know, the government going and of course, appealing the decision, and so, our huge win that we got a lot of strong public messaging on, was huge for us. But bargaining was... through this period it was also breaking down. And that's when we went into

[01:42:18] JI: looking at what kind of actions we have to take. And I think, part of this round of bargaining, that we went into was, it wasn't just about bargaining, because it became very apparent for us, that government was out to break our union as well; and so it was partly a round of bargaining to try to fight off concessions, as well as they were trying to break our union. And, that became evident as we went on... eventually rotating strikes and a full-scale strike and trying to enter into mediation. And also, what government wanted to do was to try to even strip our court victory from us. They wanted... they had language on the table that would basically negate any court victory, if we were actually successful at the time, in terms of class-size, class composition, non-enrolling. And, so that round of bargaining became about trying to protect the outcome of our court-case if we were successful, trying to get the concessions off the table, trying to break the mandate of the day and try to actually get a reasonable salary increase, that addressed the fact that we were probably about the 6th-7th lowest paid teachers across Canada.

[01:44:05] JI: Yeah... was gonna pause here.

[01:44:08] KN: And what happened? This is very important being in that round.

[01:44:46] JI: It's ... it's in 2014. Yeah, so... And so, we... during the time when we were involved in our actions, our strike actions, government also locked us out. What was interesting about this round is, that when we went to the LRB to look at what we can do in relation to strike, in this round. This round, government did not go to the LRB to try to restrict us from taking any length of strike action. And so, we went to the LRB and worked out an agreement, we could be on a full-scale strike, if needed to be. And, part of that was... I believe Peter Cameron, who believed that we've never acted like a real trade union before, because we never actually, though this was not true, 'cause we had taken strike action

[01:45:20] JI: before, but for him, to take strike action the members have to hurt by losing salary. And, so I think, that he probably persuaded government to use a different strategy on us. As well, as, they went to the- they also locked us out, so while we were on strike, we were also initially in a partial lock-out, where our members were prohibited from... working with students at lunch time, and after school, 'cause we couldn't be on the... on the site at lunch time and certain amount of time after school. So, and they went to the LRB and also were successful at the LRB in getting a 10% pay deduction for our members, so the tactic by government in this round was quite different. And we were still determined to negotiate a collective agreement, we wanted to go into mediation, I remember spending... and so, all of our actions of the day were precipitated on trying to get agreement by the end of June. And we tried

[01:46:37] JI: to,

[01:46:38] JI: everything that we could, try to get that agreement, they also locked us out the last three days of June. We had to go to the LRB to deal out things about Grade 12 exams and, some other, our reports on, for students with special needs, etc. We were, you know, going about the work that summer school, and so, we, you know we worked out all of those conditions, but I remember going into meet with Justice Kelleher, and we probably spent, him and I, probably spent, Peter Cameron; we probably spent about 4 to 5 days at the end of June in the beginning of July trying to get government, trying to persuade government to go into mediation. So, we you know, try to get this deal, by the end of June, and we almost got an agreement to go into mediation, with Justice Kelleher. But right at the last minute, and I believe that was July 1st, about 3:30 we were at the BCTF building, previously I had been at the Court House, going back and forth meeting with Justice Kelleher, and Peter Cameron and bargaining team. We were at the BCTF on July 1st, a hot, sunny day, we were in the building and faxing things back and forth, and, of course, keeping the Executive of the day informed on what was going on.

[01:48:06] JI: And we thought we had an agreement on how we would go into mediation, or the guidelines would be, and last minute government said," No." And it became-it was becoming very obvious, became very obvious that this government did not want a settlement. They weren't ready for a settlement.

[01:48:26] KN: Were we on strike by this time?

[01:48:27] JI: We were on strike. We were on strike, and we were also locked-out at this time. And we also knew that we had no strike pay. I think we had four days of strike pay for members, and government knew this as well. And before we had- went into media- or tried to get into the mediation with Justice Kelleher, we had asked Vince Ready. But Vince Ready said, he was busy. But, what Vince did say that May was, that he had some holiday time in August. I never forgot that, when he said that. But he was also involved in the court dispute at the time as well, so now we're going into summer, teachers are locked-out, teachers are... setting up picket lines, right through the summer, in different locals at the board offices, preventing, you know CUPE to go in and do any kind of maintenance work and that, so... And I remember being in... went to Ontario for a few days, and I remember listening on the news, where the premier of the day made a comment that they've been trying to get into negotiations with us, but the teachers refused (sighs and laughs). I was walking that morning... and I got on the phone to Peter Cameron, and I said, "WTF?" (laughs) "

[01:50:07] JI: I hear you've been trying to get a hold of us to get us into bargaining, but we refused?" And he had no knowledge of what the premier had said. Because there was no attempt by government... to... to get at the table. In fact, they didn't want to get at the table. And, so Peter and I, I made many phone calls back and forth with Peter over the summer trying to get them back to a bargaining table, trying to get them into another mediation round with Justice Kelleher and, all government would do is agree to a one-day of bargaining on August 8th. That was it. And we went to the table on that day, things didn't change, they tabled some more language on basically, trying to negate our court case victory if we were to win, and some other stripping type language on class-size, and at that day they said they weren't interested in Justice Kelleher, but would be interested in Vince Ready? And, so I phoned Justice Kelleher and let him know that... the employer was not interested in him doing it, thanked him for offering, phoned Vince to see if he was ready, and, you know Vince said, that he would... would consider it.

[01:51:43] JI: Of course, we had to go through the Exec to make the decision, etc., and so, so Vince Ready became the mediator in our dispute. So, as we pressed on in August and we tried to get into mediation with Vince Ready, a number of times Vince said, that, you know, parties were too far apart to engage in mediation. And, we had a huge rally at the Canada Place and... after the rally it was a Friday and I met with Vince Ready and Peter Cameron and this is when we put out publicly also, that we're willing to go into arbitration. Even though, knowing the risks, and we never... We didn't make that decision... it was a decision that we had to make after long discussion. And so, we put that out into the media, that we were going to go to our members about going into, you know, whether they'd accept arbitration. And, so we met with Vince and Peter Cameron and we sat down, as looked at the issues that we had on the table, and the stripping that they had on the table,

[01:53:11] JI: and we spent a number of hours that night kind of, trying to work out a framework on.. a framework for settlement, a framework on, you know what would go to arbitration and that. We talked about that and... It was actually a positive meeting. And then, we continued that discussion on Saturday and we went back Saturday morning and it was like Friday...

[01:53:40] KN: What time, what month is this?

[01:53:42] JI: Oh, this is in... trying to get the timeline here. End of August, early September.

[01:53:50] KN: Okay, so we were still on strike, right?

[01:53:52] JI: Still on strike, yeah. And, so I went back and it was like, the night before didn't happen. And what happened was, that, you know, in the talking it had become obvious and Peter Cameron did say this, that he actually never went to government about what we had been talking about the night before. And that government was not even aware that I was meeting with him and Vince Ready. And it seemed that... all the information was going up to a certain level and then being blocked by... the acting CEO of PSAC of the day, Lee Doney. And then... so everything we had basically kind of talked about, and, possibly moving forward just all became negated and then Peter Cameron said to me, here is a letter, and by the way we are going to the media. We're going to the media to say that... you weren't genuine. And, putting out the offer for arbitration. And that, it became apparent, etc. and I was... upset. In my way that I can be upset (laughs) I couldn't believe what I was hearing. First of all, that government wasn't even aware that we were meeting, we'd already been.... Actually, we'd already been on strike for... for a week, in September.

[01:55:43] JI: And that, knowing we had discussed how a framework, and how arbitration could happen, and almost came to an agreement on it, for him to now say this, that we were disingenuous; so... Anyway, left that meeting, and... Peter Cameron and Peter Fassbender were on the media to talk about this, and...met with the Executive. And, previous to this, we had actually tried about a two or three-day session with Vince Ready in a hotel in Richmond, previously, during the week before Labour Day weekend. And trying to get into again, an agreement to mediation. So, here we are as... there's no bargain, government refuses to bargain; we're spending our time trying to come up with how we get into mediation and government refuses to go into mediation.

[01:56:42] JI: Then Vince Ready is Vince Ready, and goes and says, the sides are too far apart. Which we were, because government had no interest in settling, as of yet. As well as I had been getting phone calls from both, Hassan Yussuff(CLC), as well as Gerry Diaz from UNIFOR. And Hassan had been meeting with the... Whenever the premiers get together, I think they were holding

[01:57:10] JI: either the Maritimes—I think they were in the Maritimes—and they were meeting and, of course, they had access to the Premier, and so... They're asking whether we want any help or support to get that agreement. And, or to get them talks happening. Alright? And, so I... Basically said, yeah, whatever you can talk to them about and in terms of actually coming to the table, to negotiate a settlement,

[01:57:36] JI: we would appreciate that, right? And asked about if I was interested in meeting with Clark, right? I said, you know, that's a possibility. And there is a suggestion that we would

meet in Toronto, outside of BC... So, I knew that that was playing in the background, and then we were having tremendous support from the BC Federation of Labour, and the BC Federation... and we were getting tremendous support from the public as well; people were donating money to our hardship funds, were supporting teachers, as they.... Ontario teachers had given us... over... Elementary and Secondary, almost 2 million dollars, to support our members, and we were getting offers of loans from the labour movement as well, so... The support out there was just huge for us, while this was also going on. And so, after this meeting, I gave Hassan a call, and said...- I mean, I was shocked that government wasn't aware (laughs)... that we were meeting... when we had been on strike for already for a number of weeks including this September, so I said to Hassan, "Arrange a meeting with Christy Clark". And so, Hassan said, he would and meanwhile we're taking a member vote on binding arbitration.

[01:59:07] JI: And so, we went to members with the vote... I got a phone call back from Hassan on the Monday, said you've got a meeting with... with... Dan Doyle, the chief of staff of Christy Clark on Wednesday. So, on Tuesday, results 99.7% of our member vote for binding arbitration. And so, government says "No" to binding arbitration. So, no bargaining, no mediation, and now not an official request for binding arbitration. On Wednesday, the media... the BC... Federation of Labour was gonna hold a news conference about... and now they say that they're gonna be lending us up to 8 million dollars. If we needed it. So, I go to the meeting with Dan Doyle, it was at the hotel at the airport, and we had a good two-hour meeting, and told him the issues, what the issues were. And another issue that came to be was a proposal from the government which came out of Justice Griffin's decision on... where Justice Griffin said that all our class-size language would be reinstated. And that any violations since 2002 would be dealt with through a grievance. And so, part of the bargain became negotiations of the grievance settlement.

[02:00:41] JI: To settle this grievance, rather than going through arbitration. So, that became part of it. But, anyways, had a good meeting with Doyle, explained the issues and was very obvious that government was not aware of all the issues at play, including protecting our court case victory if we were to win, and the concessions and a number of comments made by the Premier such as, doesn't matter whether you have teachers in class, all you need is bodies in a classroom. And so, disrespectful comments. And so the BC Federation of Labour. They have their news conference. I leave the meeting with Hassan and Dan Doyle, he says he'll get back to me about whether we're gonna get a meeting with Clark. Thursday I got a call from Vince Ready... saying, he wants to meet with Peter Cameron and me, I also get a call from Chief of staff in the morning, says, "I recommended that the Premier should meet with you". And he also said, that by the way, the Premier is going to be at the... UBC was getting a new president, there was... Gupta, not sure what his first name was, and she was gonna be there,

[02:02:05] JI: and he was wondering... He phones me, like 6:30 in the morning, and he's wondering whether we're gonna be out protesting the Premier being at the ceremony. And I said, well, first of all I didn't even know that Christy Clark was going to a ceremony for the new UBC president. And besides, we don't tell our members when to protest Christy Clark, they do it on their own, spontaneous. And so, I said to him, that well, we as an organization will not

dictate a protest. If our members show up, then our members show up... 'Cause he said, that if we were going to ask our members to protest, then she would not go to this, which I found curious, But, anyways... So, he recommends the meeting to the Premier, I go to meet with Vince Ready and Peter Cameron, we start talking about mediation. And also, this was all supposed to be a secret, the possible meeting with Clark. And so, I let Vince Ready know about some of what has been going on, also indicate to Vince Ready that if we're meeting again, then we're going into mediation; there is no more playing around. I'm trying to get into mediation.

[02:03:26] JI: We either got into mediation, or we don't do anything. So, I was pretty out front with Vince Ready, 'cause I was tired of the games government was playing. And that... And also, let him know about the meeting with Doyle; and so when I am meeting with Vince Ready I get the call from John Doyle saying, you've got a meeting with the Premier the next morning. At 9:45. And, so... we set up that we're gonna meet at the Pacific Gateway Hotel, on Friday. I have my meeting with the Premier on the... Friday morning. And we talk for about 45 minutes, Hassan was there, we had some pleasantries, like, she knows how it is for teachers not to get paid in the summer time, because her father was a teacher. I said to her that- she actually admitted to me in the meeting, that she was feeling the heat that her people, party people were getting on her which I found interesting. And that's all, really. You realize that's when Christy Clark starts to react when... the public opinion starts going against her own people. And I also said, there are some rumours that the government was either gonna legislate or they're gonna give us a final offer—vote—

[02:04:54] JI: and I said to her, if... "Of you're gonna give us a final offer vote, our members are gonna ... are gonna reject it soundly. Then what? That doesn't get us anywhere near an agreement". And so, we talked some more, again, talked about the issues, and said, we want mediation with Vince Ready, we've got set it up, and... basically, she indicated that she would talk to her side about a different mandate, about trying to get an agreement. So, we left that meeting, got set up in a hotel, and we started to negotiate an agreement. And I had said to Vince Ready that we need at least four days. This was not gonna happen in three days. At all, I just thought there was too much to concessions, the trying to get our court case, and... So we went back and forth with Vince Ready, we met with their side once, I believe on the Sunday, when they were trying to give us a final offer settlement; and we looked at the final offer settlement, and we said, "So is this really a final offer?" And they said, "Well, not really",

[02:06:13] JI: and then we just blew it apart. And, because it was nowhere near an agreement that respected our court case. As well as concessions on the table. And, I remember on the Saturday at about 5 o'clock, TV is on, Global is on, and there was a poll, and they had asked the public three questions. And we were... our support in that poll on all three questions was high. And so, the support for us in the public was still high. And so, I knew that the support was there; and I knew that the support with our members was there too. But maybe only another week or so, I thought. And, so, we went back and forth with Vince Ready, sometimes with the Employer, sometimes with just Vince Ready, myself and, even met with Lee Doney once. Then, with Peter Cameron and our staff person, John Wadge once too, and so we went back and forth. The

concessions didn't come off the table till about, I have to say, 11, 12 o'clock. The protections for our court case didn't come through... and so, after the final, kind of back-and-forth, which was done, our bargaining team was... as well as our two table officers were with us and... in the room downstairs

[02:07:49] JI: and. So, I ended up just going back and forth with them, and then, finally, probably about three in the morning, we got a deal. But I went back to the bargaining team,

[02:08:05] JI: and I said to them, that, "I want to hear what you have to say. You have to be honest about this deal, it is not everything that we want, but all the concessions are off the table. And there's some money here, we've got the grievance settlement offer, for \$105 million that was also we're able to improve that. And I want you to vote, yes or no. Because if you vote no, as a bargaining team we're not recommending this deal". And this was, like two, three in the morning. And, so I remember the bargaining team spoke, the pros and cons, and everyone said "Yes". And so, I went back up and did a couple of other little changes, I think I got an extra \$5M on the grievance settlement piece, and the extra 10 minutes of prep time, which kicks in for elementary teachers, at the end of June, and then we got the deal. That was probably about 4 in the morning on that Tuesday morning.

[02:09:20] KN: Okay.

[02:09:21] JI: And, I think it was a good deal, we ended up, you know, getting the concessions off the table, which was huge... We protected our court case, which was... Helped us instead, because we won the court case, so it was protected, the Federation had to go back into... meetings slash bargaining on our LOU 17, which is, you know, which happens. We got the... \$105 million retroactive grievance settlement and we did not negotiate that, and agreed to it, we would have lost that in our court case victory, cause that was not part of the decision. So, it was really good that we did that. And we made some really good improvements to our benefits plan, and some good improvements to our TTOCs, TTOC pay and a couple... So, over all, I think, it was a good agreement, and the members were strong, my inspiration was from the members; the members knew what the strike was all about and 'cause it was about their future in terms of class-size, class composition, support for students.

[02:10:41] JI: And I think, another thing that came out of the strike is that the public, out of any strike, understood the importance of class-size, class composition, it is important for students, and they seemed to get an understanding of that through everything that we had done. But it was also hard on our members. A lot of members lost a lot of money, and during the strike, including myself, my wife as a teacher, and we weren't getting paid. The Table Officers weren't getting paid, but we got the settlement, and our union was intact, stronger than ever.

[02:11:21] KN: Okay, well thank you for that. I... just have a couple more questions, Jim. One is, it relates to the court case, because it led to the ultimate victory. The second decision of Justice Griffin was appealed by the government, and the Court of Appeal in British Columbia turned down justice Griffin's decision in favour of the government position. The BCTF subsequently

took that to the Supreme Court of Canada, and just... I know that you were there, when the Supreme Court of Canada announced their ultimate decision, and I just wondered if you could share that experience with us? Back in 2016. I know you were no longer the President, you were Past President, but you were... you were there!

[02:12:14] JI: Yeah... I was. Past President, and very fortunate still on that Executive for that year (laughs). When that decision came down, and also, so happened that I was able to be in Ottawa and to be in the court, with the Supreme Court judges, 9 I believe, Justice McLachlin say, the Chief Justice, and, hearing our case, put on by, of course, Diane and John, and David, and... Listening to the employer's case, which was not very strong (laughs) at the time and they seemed to fumble around in terms of what they brought there, but.. Just being in that court and looking at our team, and looking at our position, and knowing that this all has to be done, like within.. Each side I believe, has something, like, an hour.

[02:13:17] JI: And then, listening to some of the questions that the judges asked the various lawyers, you know it gave you some sense of where some people, some of the judges were thinking. But when we finished and the employer finished, and saying, that, and then, Justice McLachlin saying that... they would be back... And it was interesting just hearing that they would be back. We're wondering, okay, what's gonna happen here? So, there was this recess. And we went out and we're talking and... we're feeling good. I personally, have always felt good about this final case. And, it is interesting, I never made a prediction on any of or other court cases, but on this one I did predict we were gonna win. Not necessary win everything, but I knew we were gonna win this one, I felt good about it. And then, they were calling us back like, about maybe 20 minutes later, and Justice McLachlin comes and reads, like a one-sentence... (laughs). Forget the exact wording now, but one sentence statement, and that we had won. That, (laughs) they had sided with the dissent opinion, I forget that Justices name.

[02:14:53] KN: It was Justice Donald that did the dissent.

[02:14:54] JI: Justice Donald's! opinion, and just hearing that... in, like within 20 minutes was just... huge. I think we were all stunned! That it- it just came so quickly, but so ecstatic! And, then, you know, what that meant for our future, or future of public education, and... Again, you know, like, in terms of the Federation, our members, and how we were able to just continue this. I can go to tears right now, just... Of joy... It was just huge, and I was just so blessed... that I was able to be there, and I was so grateful, that my wife, Cheryl, a classroom teacher was able to be there and witness this, as well as other Past Presidents of the organization, who've gone through this battle ever since 2002 were there as well. And of course, and Glen, our President who, you know got to be able to talk about that, the victory, was so huge. It was such a neat feeling for all of us, and being able to celebrate afterwards, for all of us, while Glen handled all the media calls and, you know phoning back to Vancouver and... the phone call I made was to, you know, my local president in Burns Lake, to let her know the good news

[02:16:32] JI: and, it was just like, such a happy moment for... for all of us, and... The bigger picture, you know, for all of our teachers and students and actually, for working people across this country, this... this... victory was huge. Still is.

[02:16:43] KN: Okay!

[02:16:54] KN: Well, thank you, Jim. I just wondered for one last questions, if there's anything else about your years as President that, any event or issue, or something that might have happened, that you want to talk about?

[02:17:07] JI: Yeah, I had... I had three great years as President it was such an honour to be President of the BCTF, as I know, it was an honour for you too, Ken... And, you know, to be able to, you know, talk with the members, and to be there with members, and... and... you know, some of the- some of the other highlights, I think were, you know, once, we got our agreement and... and we knew there was a lot of curriculum revisions happening across this province, and knowing that even though we've had this rocky relationship with government, that we still had to work with the government of the day to try to... to make some improvements and get supports for our members and continue our advocacy. But I think, we were able to negotiate uh... two additional days for- for our members for curriculum implementation, over... a three-year period. I think that was huge, 'cause that never happened, and that we were able to negotiate that with the Liberal government, and members got additional two days of in-service to work with the revised curriculum. And also, very...very proud, I am glad I was part of it... during my time as the President, and the work that we were doing in the areas of... of Truth and Reconciliation, and.. And I know we, well, took to heart the calls of action, because education was part of... of... the... I don't want to say "genocide", is just what Sinclair used in terms of Indigenous children in particular, and families,

[02:19:00] JI: but... Being able to be part of the Project of Heart, being President during that time when we got that going, and other initiatives in the area for the Truth and Reconciliation. And working towards, you know, the healing process.

[02:19:21] JI: And trying to improve the life of Indigenous... of Indigenous kids in particular, Indigenous communities and being part of that with our tremendous staff who just worked on that and continue to work on that. I think that was probably another highlight for me. And being able to be part of that and going to some of the Truth and Reconciliation events, including an event in Winnipeg, where- you know at the... with Gail and with Nancy, and who worked really hard on the Project of Heart and other work, and with the support of...

[02:20:13] JI: of... Charlene as well. I think, that probably, some of the highlights amongst... (Laughs) other highlights are as President.

[02:20:23] KN: So, Jim, during your period as President, the relations have warmed between the BCTF and the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Can you talk a bit about that?

[02:20:32] JI: Yeah... It started a little bit with Susan Lambert, and then probably escalated during my time, where, you know, I met with the President of the CTF about possibility of re-joining and what it would take, and.. So, we worked on a number of areas, it was almost like a negotiation on how it would happen if we were to re-join, but I think there was a sense that CTF had progressed as an organization, and worked on various areas that we were working on, in terms of international work and social justice work, mental health, Indigenous education, and they were moving forward in this area, and we thought that was probably time to look at re-joining. And we went to our members, and talked about, you know, what the benefits would be of re-joining the Canadian Teachers' Federation, being part of that... that community of teachers across Canada. And the other thing, CTF had always been there, supporting us in our struggles and during our last strike, and so, I was very pleased to be able to be involved in those negotiations and then, when our members made that decision at our Annual General Meeting to, to re-join the CTF and to be able to be at the CTF AGM where they welcomed us back into the Federation;

[02:22:04] JI: so I thought that was the... that was another high point at the end of my term as President, and I am really glad that we are back in the CTF now.

[02:22:13] KN: Okay—thank you.