

Interview: Kit Krieger (KK)

Interviewer: Wayne Axford (WA), Ken Novakowski (KN)

Assisted by: Lesley Harrington

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[00:00:10] WA: It is April 27th, 2015, we are interviewing Past BCTF President Kit Krieger, who was President in 1997 to 1999; the interview is being conducted by myself, Wayne Axford and Ken Novakowski, and technical assistance today is provided by Lesley Harrington. So, welcome! And, thank you for taking time to join us on this interview.

[00:00:35] KK: Delighted to be here.

[00:00:36] WA: That's great! Can you give us a little of your background—where it all began, you know, where and when were you born, and where were you raised?

[00:00:47] KK: I was born in San Francisco, California, on April 16th, 1949. I moved to Vancouver on December 22nd, I think, 1949. I don't recall making that decision, but I must have thought, at the age of 8 months, the best is to follow my parents. So, my father was from San Francisco, my mother—from New York; his brother, was connected to the Oppenheimer family by marriage; his brother married into the Oppenheimer family in Vancouver, who ran the oldest businesses in BC; he (my dad's brother) wore out his welcome with the many family members, so he came up here to work for his last brother-in-law, who would employ him. And, so, I'm, essentially, a virtual native, but notwithstanding I had for much of my life, I think, an American orientation in all things political, and it wasn't probably till university, when I began to develop a Canadian identity.

[00:01:39] WA: So, as many people, coming into Vancouver, it was a family connection, that brought you here.

[00:01:43] KK: Yeah. My father's brother had come here in 1939, 10 years earlier.

[00:01:47] WA: And what did your family pursue when they got here, back in the day?

[00:01:50] KK: My dad worked for the Oppenheimer Brothers, which was a food brokerage company, started in the year of 1858, during the Gold Rush; the family had come up from Germany to San Francisco, and then, to Vancouver. And my mother was a, typical of her generation, a housewife, who raised four kids.

[00:02:06] WA: Do you recall anything in your family background that might have connected you to political organizations, the progressive fronts?

[00:02:16] KK: My family—my father, he was a history graduate, as I was, from a California university, Berkeley. He's 97 now, and we talked about this, because I am doing his biography with him, his autobiography. And, he was a... Well, he first voted in 1940. And he voted for Willkie, against Roosevelt. Now, my family is of European Jewish ancestry, I don't know if there was a Jew in California, or the United States, who didn't vote for Roosevelt. My father didn't because, he thought, no one should run for four terms. Democratic Party in those years was dominated by the Southern racists. It was not the Democratic Party of today—dominated by racists, who live everywhere. But, he was, somewhat in the middle, or maybe—maybe—even somewhat Conservative-bent; the family though, was, sort of, mainstream Democratic. And then, he became progressively more left, by the 1950 or 1960s, like his older brother, whom he admired, became a Social Democrat. And, my mother came from a very solid Democratic, Roosevelt-y (side) and believed, the government made a difference. My politics were shaped by the generation, which I grew up

[00:03:31] KK: in and got very involved. As an American citizen, I had registered for the war;

[00:03:35] KK: I remember getting very involved in the anti-war movement in the 1960s, and got involved in some Democratic politics, and in 1972 Americans abroad were allowed to vote for the first time, so I got involved in what's been called Democrats Abroad for McGovern; eventually, headed the organization, until it was discovered that I wasn't allowed to collect money, and then had to find a lot of people, whom I had collected dollars and two dollars from at UBC to give them back. But really, the anti-war movement, got involved in anti-racist activities, so I am definitely more of a product, generally, I would say, of a progressive, but a strongly liberal family tradition. And, my generation.

[00:04:21] WA: What's your background in schools in British Columbia? Where did you go to school?

[00:04:26] KK: I went to William Osler elementary in Vancouver, and then to Winston Churchill high-school, then, I was supposed to go to Whittier College, Richard Nixon's Alma Mater. I applied to a lot of schools in the US. My mother was from a school which is now a part of the University of Virginia, my father—from Berkeley, my brother went to Stanford. Everybody, we oriented to the States. I went to Whittier in 1967, and discovered, well, I'd be very involved in the anti-war movement, and as Nixon's Alma Mater they were holding a "Support the President" rally,

[00:04:56] KK: so I decided I couldn't stay there and came back to Vancouver. To show you how things were different, I went into UBC that day, and said, can I go here? And they said, OK! I think you had to be 18, unless you weren't, and so I enrolled into UBC, did history there, took some time out to travel, then did my 5th year, my Professional Program in 1973–74. Then I got my first teaching position. I remember I was offered three positions on the same day, again, times were different: in Richmond, in Delta, where I'd done my practicum, and late into the game, through Charles Ungerleider, who had been my sociology professor at UBC, and later,

deputy minister; in fact, deputy minister during part of my presidency, and a close friend; Charlie phoned me and told me, that Jim Carter, who later became the deputy minister, was looking for a social studies teacher. I went to West Van, was interviewed; remember answering one question—what's your educational philosophy—I had no idea, they said, the more you have, the better you are; offered me the job, and I took it, because it was a lesser drive, than the other two districts.

[00:06:04] KK: And that was the beginning of my education career.

[00:06:07] WA: Do you remember any early experiences, either in high-school, or university, that inspired you to move into a direction, that is education?

[00:06:18] KK: My brother had gone into education. He was never really—an older brother—whom I looked to for guidance. I loved history. Took every history course I could manage at UBC; never thought I was inclined to go into law, which many people in history do; and realized, if I love history, maybe I should teach it. I don't remember having a great calling for it, but I don't remember also, believing I had a lot of options. I don't remember thinking of myself as someone, who could do anything he'd put his mind to, because I don't think about my mind very much in those days. And then, I happily discovered, that the choice that I had made from these limited options, was a good one. I really enjoyed teaching. A lot.

[00:07:00] WA: So, it seems like your background, which you described, your philosophy, your activism and things that you were involved in, fit quite nicely into your chosen field of social studies.

[00:07:12] KK: Yep, absolutely. And I always had a very strong—in my class I did a lot with kids on trying to get them to have a conceptual framework of history, I love history of ideas, especially, in West Vancouver, where kids came from very privileged backgrounds—love to, as my mentor Ungerleider would say, hit them in the gut, try to make them leave school, thinking what they came to school believing, they couldn't adhere to anymore. I took some risks, I used to teach a play called Fanshen, about the coming of the Chinese Revolution to a village in China in 1946; it was very strongly pro-communist, that I taught. I took the kids to see the play "Bent" in 1971–72, which was about the experience of homosexuals in the Third Reich. The things I did then, one cannot do now, because of the regulatory regime over teaching. That's why I was very fortunate to have come into teaching at a time where there were a lot of very progressive social studies teachers. That was the age, when the focus was going from dead white males in the Euro-centric history to social studies, as an inter-weighted discipline, involving political science, political philosophy,

[00:08:27] KK: and, I was not very much of a geographer, but human geography. It was a very creative time I got involved. My first sort of collective engagement with professionals, was in the curriculum councils of those days, which were finding a way to have a curriculum that better engaged the diversity of kids we had in schools then.

[00:08:47] WA: You're reflecting back on the early days of teaching in West Vancouver and a lot of openness, freedom to pursue the issues and the ideas that you want; and has it changed, do you think—in your mind from that time?

[00:09:03] KK: I haven't been in a classroom since 2001. So, that is a long time. But I have, through my work as a Local Association President since that time, from 2001 to 2007; my role in the regulatory structure in BC College of Teachers, and what I see now, working with the Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, I think it's very different. This is a more conservative time, the purpose of schooling, which in my era, in the minds of all teachers was about developing citizens, which now is about LNG and BC jobs plan. Teachers in my generation, we were influenced by the progressive thinkers, kids now are more of a product of the neo-conservative age. Having said that, there are some very progressive teachers out there. I think, it's more difficult. I think there's a lot more eyes on someone, where's the system was once very devoted to social gains; I think, the system now defines itself as trying to maximize the capital of each individual student. And I think that makes it much more difficult for a teacher to engage in a more socially purposeful education system.

[00:10:24] WA: So, going back to your early teaching years. What do you recall as being some of the joys of teaching? What gave you that excitement of being in the classroom?

[00:10:34] KK: Well, first of all, I loved questions, the give-and-take of questioning. There was a physicist, named Hans Bethe who won the Nobel Prize for his role in developing the hydrogen bomb; and Bethe was a refugee from the Nazi Germany, and he was being asked why we was such a good student, and he said: "Because every day I would come home from school, my parents would ask me, what happened to you in school, that raised the question? Not, what did you learn?", and when I heard that, I thought, that's what I was going to try to do. And I used to have prizes for kids, who asked the best question; and looking back, I talk to a fair amount of my former students, I think I was a very poor teacher for much of my career. I think, I learned about teaching after I left the classroom, came to the BCTF, and began to work collaboratively. Teaching was so isolating in those days. Everything I did, I did on my own, and on a rare occasion I would have an opportunity to work with some colleagues.

[00:11:36] KK: And it wasn't until I came to work at Federation on staff that I began to learn the power of collaborations. So, I became a better teacher when I went back, and I went back for about total of 5 years after that. But I loved the kids, I loved the content, I taught a lot about the holocaust, that was a major interest of mine; I loved bringing survivors, and people, who had been in trenches of WWII, did a lot of plays, and the kids—

[00:12:08] KK: not every kid, but the kids were engaged. That's what I enjoyed. I coached a very bad softball team, which gave me some pleasure looking back, but not at the time.

[00:12:18] WA: OK—let's make the transition now from Kit Krieger, the classroom teacher, to Kit Krieger, now involved in the local union movement, and eventually, getting into the BCTF. So, what were those first initial steps for you getting involved at the local level?

[00:12:35] KK: Actually, my first job was at Safeway, and I was a member of the Retail Food and Drug Clerks Union. And I learned that the employer was not very considerate of me. I never went to work (before), and I discovered that if I had worked 13 hours a week, I'd get benefits. And learned, that I never would get benefits, because I'll never be given 13 hours a week, like a lot of us, who were working. So, I learned very quickly, that the only group, who was trying to help me out was my union. Those were summer jobs, so I should have been more engaged, but I had an understanding, that the union made it strong, so to speak. So when I went to teach in West Vancouver, my involvement was initially through curriculum work, and I got involved in things like curriculum councils. But it wasn't until, I guess, well into my career, 1981, when I got more involved in the anti-racist education. And I remember coming to Summer Conference a few times, working with Ed May, who was at the time doing some presentations of the Jim Keegstra affair, and Keegstra was a teacher in Eckville, Alberta, who made the national headlines by teaching kids that holocaust never happened,

[00:13:59] KK: so I started doing some workshops for the BCTF anti-racist program with Ed May. And then, in 1986 I had some mentors in West Vancouver, who'd encourage me to get involved—notably, Heather Walker, who is one of Margaret Trudeau's sisters, and her successor, Local President whose name was Maureen Ciarniello. Maureen Ciarniello took the job as President as a teacher on call; got a full-time job, and said, I don't want to be President anymore, and she called me in the summer of 1986—so it's been about a dozen years into my career— and asked me if I'd run for President. And, I've been there, but all I've really done before is come to meetings, I spoke at meetings, but was never on the Executive, not even a staff rep. I've confined my work to curriculum and the anti-racist areas. I told her I had no interest in leaving the classroom, thank you anyway, and I believed at the time, thinking, why me, I certainly am not cut out for this. I then got a call from the President Elect of the Federation, Elsie McMurphy. And Elsie said, I've heard good things about you, would you run for Local President.

[00:15:09] KK: I said, absolutely not, I'm very happy as a classroom teacher, you don't know who I am, so I don't know why you're calling me, and I was rather dismissive. And eventually I, after having a few people report to me, I said, I will take you up on one condition: I want to teach, but I'll take it, if you'd find someone else to do it with me. So, I'll share the job—I'll do it in the morning, and the other guy will do it in the afternoon; or a woman; but I am not going to do this on my own. I am not ready to take a break from teaching. And the local went, found and recruited a colleague of mine, with the name of Peter LaFaire, who was a PE teacher, and who got hired with me in 1974 to teach at Centennial, West Van, and he said, OK! So, then, knowing very little—and I, actually, missed Summer Conference, because I went to Europe with kids, so I missed the very, very, critical training a local president would need to have. This is September, 1986, I've begin my role, and very quickly, I found the Federation—two things I've discovered,

[00:16:09] KK: where one is, the Federation provided remarkable support for local presidents, and very quickly, the training that I've missed at Summer Conference, was provided through a network of very, very interesting—including Michael Lombardi—metro presidents, and we then

began to meet. We were all very new, and very, very enthusiastic. Then I also learned, in my role, that not every teacher had been as fortunate as I have, to be left alone, and I came across a lot of teachers, who were having trouble, who were having less-than-full support from the board, and I realized there's only one agency in this province, looking out for teachers. We have an un-conflicted obligation and responsibility to teachers. If you're a trustee, you have the Ministry, or the superintendent, or the union, sometimes; if you're a superintendent, you have your eyes focused on the ministry and the board, and the union, and your senior staff. If you're a teacher you're looking after the kids, and the parents, and the board, and that was all I had to worry about. I remember, later that year, Sharon Yandle, who had been recruited from the health care sector to our union to help us organize our certification, explained to me Section 11 of the Labour Code, and what it means when somebody signs a union card. And it means, that they are unable to negotiate for themselves, the union is the sole agent. And this incredible moral responsibility

[00:17:32] KK: turns out to be a modest responsibility in the Labour Code, it is very difficult to be found not fairly representing somebody. I was involved with the Labour Code three times during my presidency. One member, who was convinced he was not being represented, he was then deemed a vexatious litigant by the LRB, but that struck me, now, that I got huge responsibility, because I never failed to stand up for myself, but many people, can't. And I realized quickly, that there was a huge obligation, and only the union was doing it. (It) very quickly made me realize, that I had a job, that I, actually, liked even more, than teaching. That year, on April 4th, 1987, before the end of my first year as President, I attended the meeting called by then minister Tony Brummet, and deputy minister Sandy Peel at the Richmond Inn on the Westminster Highway, where they introduced the Bill 19 and Bill 20. And that was the legislation, which gave the BCTF right to unionize, and so, I just came to this job when there was a tremendously transformational time for teachers, you know, going back to the Bargaining Task Force a dozen years earlier, this elusive and not very well auditioned goal of unionizing became possible,

[00:19:00] KK: so I got very involved in the organizing campaign that year. The choice that the Bill 19 gave to teachers, was either to unionize, or to form an association. The union would have full bargaining rights—almost full, there were three areas in the act that were off-limits for bargaining; and the right to strike. And the Association model was the professional model, and you wouldn't have the right to strike, and you would not have the right to bargain, but you could sort of, collectively plead. Well, that time the Federation was very concerned, that that would be a tough sell to a number of locals. That my local, in particular, in West Vancouver, being very high demographic, socio-economic area, lots of teachers, who were the wives of executives; had a lot of community sentiment against unionization, that we would be at risk. Remember, Gulf Islands, there were a number of us, who said, we'll never unionize? The Certification campaign was tremendously well organized event at the Federation; it was a remarkable event to go on a very short order, between April of 1987 and the end of that year, to organize and sign the 99%, roughly, of the members of the Federation.

[00:20:17] KK: In West Van we signed up everybody, but one. That was, again, the power of the union that was demonstrated, and it was a wonderful experience.

[00:20:27] WA: So, what was the pathway for Kit Krieger, the Local President of West Vancouver, to BCTF?

[00:20:33] KK: So, maybe the others would know that better, than I, but I was certainly, enthusiastic, and engaged. I quickly joined the opportunity to unionize under the Bill 19. That created split between the progressive forces in the Federation. The party that governed the Federation at that time was called Teacher Viewpoint, and it viewed, the opportunity should be available only to those locals, who unionize. And, Viewpoint split and the majority of Viewpoint, adopted a view that the main priority for teachers in British Columbia, is to remain united, believing, that not everyone will vote to unionize. I think, nobody would have predicted in the summer of 1987, that we would have 75 locals unionize. So, the split between union of unions, and their umbrella union emerged when Viewpoint split into two groups. The large group, Teachers for United Federation—I quickly joined that. Because that was certainly my view, and first of all, I've just believed, the intent of Bill 19 was to fracture the Federation, and why would you adopt a policy which would achieve that end, and because I believed, that unionization will take time.

[00:21:58] KK: I thought we could get some 60 locals the first time, and maybe, over time, get more, and so, like a lot of others, I became very devoted to that cause. I remember speaking at a rally in Victoria, where we held a Special Rep Assembly in Victoria; a number of Special RAs were held over that year; and I was asked to speak, so somebody must have said, this guy, whom nobody really knew very much; had something to say. And I remember as I spoke, Bill Vander Zalm walked across the legislature. And, I stopped in the middle of my remarks, which were brief, there wasn't supposed to be a very big speech, because I was one of many, who were going to speak that day; and I said, stop, Mr. Vander Zalm, why don't I tell you about some teachers in my district? And I mentioned a guy, named Barry Rector, who would have been sponsoring an event at our school, and at two in the morning prepping the place for that, had fallen off a ladder and broken his arm, or leg, or something, you know, these are the people you're going after.

[00:23:02] KK: They work hard for kids! Because at the time there was a very strong sentiment, the government was motivated, in Bill 19 and Bill 20, in, both the creation of the union versus the association option, and the creation of the College of Teachers, trying to pay back the Federation for a decade of opposition to the Social Credit government. And then I got to know staff. I was at the end encouraged to apply for a vacancy on staff, as the Assistant Director of what was called the Organization Support Division that looked after both, communications staff and training. I applied for that position in 1989, so only two years into my Local Presidency, and was very fortunate, came on staff and learned a great deal during the four years there.

[00:23:51] WA: Your pathway into the Federation was quite a bit different, perhaps, than, some of the other predecessors in the role of President, coming in as a staff person, first, before becoming President.

[00:24:01] KK: And, my arrival on staff was also quite abrupt. When I got a call from Bob Buzza, who was the Executive Director, to offer me the job, he said, he had never offered a job to someone, who had less impressive credentials. I don't know whether that was a compliment, or an insult; I don't know what it was, I just said, thank you very much. But I did not bring a lot to the... it was a very short history that I had, but I maybe, made up for it with enthusiasm, what I lacked in experience. But, from staff to President, was not a very common role.

[00:24:43] WA: And, how many years were you here, on staff?

[00:24:46] KK: In those days, still, I believe, as the case now, the policy is that there will be a balance of 50/50 or roughly 60/40 between temporary and continuing staff. I was hired on a term appointment; and that was a big issue. I was actually involved in the staff union, a part of the bargaining team, and we always tried to bargain for continuing appointments, quite unsuccessfully, and I wanted to stay. I remember being very happy, working in a team with Larry Kuehn, as Director, Mavis Lowry, who was the guru. The two people, who know about the education finance like no one else, that's Mavis and Joan Axford. And Mavis taught me a lot about the education finance, Elaine Decker, in communications, and Nancy Hinds, doing communications as well. And I learned so much by being part of that team. I think there was a time that the Federation was growing tremendously, as a union, developing the staff training program, and I loved it. So, I was very happy to stay, I remember going to see Ken Novakowski, Past President, and the Director of the Bargaining Division, telling him how I wanted to stay there, any way he can arrange it,

[00:26:07] KK: and he had told me that there were some other things planned for me. And, he subsequently said, there's no job for me here, and I, not very happily, went back to teach. Remember, going back to teaching was much more difficult, than had been before. The six years away. Not only we had the pedagogy change, but my heart was with the union, not in the school anymore. The classroom was very limited focus for change, and just as, you know, you work at the district level and it is hard to go back to the classroom, I was working on the provincial level, and was very happy to do so.

[00:26:40] WA: So, the next step—how did you get back? Classroom in West Vancouver, then back to the BCTF, but now, as a member of the Executive?

[00:26:54] KK: So, I taught for two years, 1993 to 1995, and in 1994, I decided I would run for the Executive. So, one year in the classroom, and I decided I would run for a Member at Large, and in fact, at that time, TUF, Teachers for United Federation, was, looking at its succession. And I remember going to Dim Sum at a restaurant, on Cambie and 57th, called The Flamingo, with Jamie Ross, who was the President of Coquitlam, and a good friend, and Debbie Gregg, who was a Coquitlam teacher and a long-time friend, and we said, let's get more involved and let's get

involved politically. And, the question was who would run for... I think this was Ken's presidency coming to an end, Ray Worley, perhaps was President, and Alice McQuade was

[00:27:58] KK: about to run, and we flipped the coin, and I think, I got the President, and he got the 1st Vice-President. We both ran in the TUF caucus for President and Vice-President, and lost, and so we both ran for Members at Large. And I ran in 1994 for Member at Large, as part of the TUF platform, and I am trying to think, I think, that was Alice's first year. And so, I served happily and faithfully as her Member at Large, then the next year, I ran for 1st Vice-Presidency. I'd been elected two-year-term, but I ran, I think, Member at Large once, 2nd Vice-President—once, President—4 times and, I believe, in the sixth or seventh elections, my vote, which topped the polls in 1994, went down every time. So I looked good from far away, as I recall. But, I was elected in 1994, then in 1995 I was elected 2nd Vice-President, and in 1996—I guess, I served my two years—

[00:29:10] KK: and in 1997, when Alice's term came to end; now, it didn't come to end, but due to attrition, that a President should serve no more, than three terms.

[00:29:17] KK: The one-

[00:29:31] KK: year-presidency had been from 1916 to, I think, 1967; 1967 until Larry Kuehn, I think, there were two-year-presidencies, and Larry Kuehn was the first three-year-president; and, with a few exceptions. Ray Worley, I think, stepped down after two years; there were three-year-presidencies, unless you step aside. Alice, I believe, wanted to continue, the caucus decided otherwise, and that's why I ran for President in 1997, and was successful.

[00:29:45] WA: So, in 1997, when you decided to continue to run for President, what were the big issues that you recall at that time, that motivate you to keep going?

[00:29:57] KK: Well, there were number of major issues. One was, the Federation was split between, more frankly, the left and the loony-left. So, I'm on the left, and I thought that the Teacher Viewpoint, which controlled roughly, 35– 40% of the votes of the Federation, must not take control of the Federation. I thought, they were fiscally irresponsible, but most of all, I just thought that they advocated a degree of confrontation, and the focus away from a classroom teacher. And, I understood it—they saw themselves, perhaps, more as a social justice vehicle, more a political vehicle, I thought, those were good things, but I also thought, Federation's primary concern needs to be support for its members. And I thought, that was always Teachers for United Federation's view—a united union, where the leadership tried to bring as much of its members along with it, as possible. Knowing, that then it was 43,000 teachers, you're not going to have everybody on your side, but I thought, in sort of, political terms, Teacher Viewpoint was more of a democratic-centralist organization, and we were a more democratic organization.

[00:31:15] KK: So, the two big issues at the time. One was the amalgamation of school districts. So, the government had amalgamated school districts in 1996.

[00:31:26] KK: And the big issue for the amalgamation, were the by-laws of the Federation. By-laws 3.4, which had been passed in the mid-1970s, provided, that if the school districts were amalgamated, locals would follow. So, one union for every employer. And that made sense in a number of ways. One, it was the Constitutional By-law, secondly, it was fiscally responsible. When the Teacher Viewpoint had the reigns of Federation, they ran deficits annually; and, with one exception during the TUF years, there were balanced budgets. I thought that was important for the membership. Federation was already a union, that did a lot, and charged the members pretty hefty dues, there, I thought, (balancing) was an important thing to do. And, the third issue was, democratic representation, that if you don't amalgamate the locals, then the amalgamated locals, which maintained multiple presidents, and multiple representatives at the AGMs and the Rep Assemblies, who were a challenge in terms of one-member-one-vote. We had made in Federation some adjustments – reasonably, so that a small local, someone like Central Coast, or Lake Cowichan would have greater representation per member, than Surrey.

[00:32:47] KK: You can't make it equal, but the other was to, I thought, skew things considerably. So that issue became a very big wedge issue between the two parties. The Teacher Viewpoint said, government should not dictate our structures, we should continue to support the unions, which were to be amalgamated into single unions under our by-laws. And I believed—first of all, the by-law is the by-law, if you don't want to do it, change the by-law—and there were several votes from 1996, to about 1999 or the 2000 AGMs, and the by-law repeatedly was upheld, but the Federation was unable to take steps to affect the amalgamation. We got a legal opinion at the time, that suggested, a by-law required for amalgamation, didn't provide a timeline; meanwhile, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, others—there were a number of provinces which had amalgamated districts, and, of course, there'd been an amalgamation in BC in the 1920s, and again in 1944, it was nothing new, but the response was politicized by the two-party system of the Federation. So, at the 1997 AGM the amalgamation by-law... to change the by-law was before the meeting, and I remember, standing in line, ready to speak to it. And, Alice McQuade, the soon-to-be Past President tabled a resolution; and that, I believe, was a very fatal decision.

[00:34:13] KK: I think, the votes weren't there at the time that carried that. I guess, Alice wanted to go out without a divided membership, and I don't remember it being part of the plan, according to the plan, because the caucus would always plan these things, and that was the kiss of death—it gave the Teacher Viewpoint time to organize and strategize against that, and the majority. And this is, sort of my mea culpa—I failed to provide the leadership that kept that coalition together, because the Teacher Viewpoint went to many a local, which were amalgamated, and said, vote for us, we'll keep you around. I kept saying, you have to follow the by-laws, change the by-laws, but don't act contrary to the by-

[00:35:00] KK: laws.

[00:35:44] KK: That was a big issue. The other issue was social justice. So, the Federation had well-established and very effective social justice networks, particularly, and there were two

major ones. One, for the program against racism, and one was in the women's program. And by 1997, there were a number of other issues, including combating poverty, combating homophobia, and I believed, that was the people in our caucus, that said, we need to get away from the two networks, and need to get into more integrated social justice model. And, that became another very contentious issue that polarized the Federation. In fact, the votes we had on that social justice model were very close votes, always decided on very close counts—51.5% to 48.5%; they were just razor-thin majorities. Thinking back, they were probably insufficient majorities to move the Federation forward, but this was particularly the time around the Surrey book-banning case. The demand for social programs to combat homophobia grew very important, and they needed to have an equal status within the Federation, but there was an assistance (fund), that the other networks dominated.

[00:36:29] KK: So that was another issue. And, the third issue was, as always, in a union, and its collective bargaining. So, in 1996 we went back to the bargaining table, and it was a very contentious round of bargaining—and we have the questions, that get us into that—but I remember, once being asked by the former Premier, Glenn Clark, why I lost the election in 1999. I'm the only President, by the way, in the 100 years of the Federation, who was defeated as incumbent. I've always had me fingers crossed, that someone else would join me in that club, but hasn't happened yet (laughs). And I told him, I think, there were about six reasons. One of which, was, that I was at a press conference with him over that contract of 1998. But, the bargaining was another big issue. The collective bargaining in British Columbia in education has always been very challenging; many contracts were settled without the agreement between the parties, if it was mutually satisfactory. And mine was one of those,

[00:37:39] KK: and that was a pivotal issue of my presidency.

[00:37:42] WA: So, those are really good descriptions of the events within the Federation, and the political, social, cultural issues of the day. What do you recall of the general context in the British Columbia of the issues of the day, which drew the Federation into this discussion?

[00:38:02] KK: Well, it was, from a perspective of a teacher, it was not a terrible time. The NDP were in power, it was between the 1991 and 2001 we had, both the Harcourt and Glenn Clark governments, and Ujjal Dosanjh, and also,

[00:38:27] KK: Dan Miller as Premiers, but, essentially, from a person, who is a social democrat, that's better than the alternative. Having said that, there were many progressive governments of that time, that were faced with fiscal constraints, they governed more like, sometimes, conservatives and liberals, than people hoped they would. So the challenge is; the Federation is a very progressive organization, and the people, who are leading this Federation have very clear visions of a just world. And the challenge in leading the Federation is how you deal with government. Government holds a lot of cards, and there are those, who would say, that you must put a lot of pressure on government, and you must push them where they don't want to go. And then, there's a view that you can only push them so far, and you must try to work with

government the best you can. And, I don't know if I had a philosophy about that, but I think I had a tendency by my personality, to do the latter. And so, the bargaining of 1998, in which the government went into the one of the pivotal issues that happened just before my presidency, was the creation of the Public Sector Employers' Council.

[00:39:47] KK: And this ironically, came from a New Democratic government; and came, I understand from the BCGEU, which to save jobs, they would negotiate job security, and not much else—they were generous on salary, and we thought, other unions did better. And they argued for a much more collaborative table, than existed in any province at the time. And I don't know what the NDP thought of at the time, but they certainly, went for it, but it turned out to be a very, very difficult structure for all unions in BC, because, what it does, it allows government to set a mandate, you don't sit down to negotiate your salary at the table, the way you would in the old days. The government says, here's the mandate, then directs a very highly co-ordinated public sector employers' side, and simply says, that's all there is. It has been a very, very powerful tool on behalf of the government against labour. In 1998 the NDP were using that as a means, the best they could, I thought, for progressive social issues. They decided that they would have a mandate of zero, zero and two over the three years of the agreement, with a lot of attention to the lower-paid unionized workers—people working in community services.

[00:41:05] KK: These people were then working for \$6 an hour, \$5 an hour; and they needed \$15 an hour or more. And they were very clear, that they were going to do that, and that was hard for me, as a believer in those things, to say, well, I'm against that now that my job, of course, was to get a good deal for teachers. At the same time they set-up another process, called the Core Process, which was looked after by the former Yukon Premier by the name of Tony Penikett. And Tony's job was to go to the unions, who were the allies of the NDP, and to say, although, we can't give you any more at the table, we have another pot of money, so we can address the priorities of your union. So the nurses came with issues around health and safety; we came with the issue around class-size and composition. And, so, I think, our union was split, as to whether that was good enough, whether we should have been more oppositional. In fact, the day I was defeated for the President in 1999, and I am not sure I saw it coming—other people did, but it was a very close election.

[00:42:14] KK: I remember, when the results were public, very shortly after Janet Steffenhagen, who was the reporter for the Vancouver Sun, interviewed me very quickly, and then went to David, and said, David, why did you win? Big upset! And David Chudnovsky said: "Because Kit was too close to government". And, I think the circumstances of the deal of 1998, along with amalgamation of school districts, along with social justice, all contributed, to, not my defeat, which really doesn't matter very much, but the defeat of the Teachers for United Federation, which, I thought, was not a good thing for the Federation. So, the big issues, were, the NDP were trying as best as they could, in my view, to advance a socially progressive agenda, in time, where there were big deficits, and they were not able to do a lot of things. It wasn't exactly like the years from 1972 to 1975, where every time something worked out, everyone said, my god, the world is unfolding, as it should.

[00:43:13] WA: We'd like to talk about your role in that 1998 contract, as there was some controversy...

[00:43:22] KK: There's controversy—it remains, without a doubt, the most controversial deal... So, we were bargaining, as was normal, with BCPSEA. Their chief negotiator was a guy named Ken Halliday; this was the second

[00:43:43] KK: round of provincial bargaining,

[00:43:45] KK: so the first would have been the 1996. So, in 1998 we go to the table, with BCPSEA; the 1996 agreement had been very, very unsatisfactory agreement, legislated, and providing for virtually no improvements for teachers at all. And the previous two, which were from the final round of local bargaining—when people look back at the local bargaining, they think, local bargaining was a great success—and it was a great success in the first two rounds of 1988 and 1990, because there was a tremendous pent-up demand for salary increases after the regime of the Compensation Stabilization Board. And, also, we were well-organized; we had tremendous organization at the Federation; and we were way ahead of the employer. By 1992 the employer caught up; they were using professional negotiators, the government was beginning to, I think, understand, how successful the Federation had been; and the third round of bargaining, I would argue, was absolutely unsuccessful. People want to go back to the old days, they're not thinking of 1992-4. So, we were at the table for roughly, seven months, with no progress being made at all, just absolutely, nowhere. And, through the series of meetings, it was determined, that—although, versions here vary, this is sort of cloak and dagger stuff—

[00:45:08] KK: but it was decided, that, perhaps the best bet was to enter into negotiations directly between the government, and the Federation, without BCPSEA at the table. And, that was taken to the decision-making bodies of the Federation, and they were approved, but with a very, very substantial opposition, that this bargaining must be open, it must be with the employer, this was unorthodox to a great degree. And I think it was, November of 1997, that we began these discussions away from the employer. At the table was Tony Penikett, who was the architect of the Core Process, Don Avison, who was the deputy minister of education at the time, a woman, named Annette Wall, who was from the Public Sector Employers' Council, and on our side, was our bargaining team. As President, I was a member of the bargaining team. So, over several months, pieces come together, and, particularly, in class-size and composition. So, that story went back, in fact, early in my presidency, one of the first meetings I've had with Glen Clark, was at his office, down at the Pan Pacific;

[00:46:37] KK: and I went with Ken Novakowski and Elsie; and we had a discussion. Glen was interested in a testing regime, and getting more accountability in the system; and I said to him, why don't you do something a little smarter, why don't you do what California is doing. California just initiated a major initiative to reduce class-sizes in K-3. And that, apparently, appealed to him. And they then, came back to the table with proposals to achieve smaller class-size in K-3, which were based on Project Star Longitude, a study in Tennessee, that showed that

if you reduce the class-size in primary grades, the advantages go well beyond that, even if you have larger classes in the senior grades, with particular benefit for low SES and ESL kids, and kids in poverty. But we were, obviously, going for something beyond K–3; for our class-size and composition, the language was quite expansive. As things progressed, the government actually, went where we wanted to go. We actually, tabled language, and they would say, now we have a bit more money to put in for K–3, and by the time it was over, there was quite a substantial amount of money.

[00:47:49] KK: In fact, there was about \$125 million a year, for 3 years in class-size and composition; then there was another, what turned out about \$60 million for early retirement incentive plan, tremendous benefits for TOCs, by the amount of hours they had to work to get EI, reduced from 7.19 to 7.1.

[00:48:14] KK: My understanding was, that it ate-up about 85% of funds for the public sector. Because we went first, there was a tremendous incentive, for whoever went first. So, we're at the table until about February. And, in February, the negotiations break down. And I wasn't entirely aware why that happened. Things seemed to be going pretty much the same, as usual, but over a demand we made, they walked away from the table. They came back again, after the AGM. And on, I think, it was April 7th, we signed an agreement in committee, for this deal. And the deal was primarily class-sizes, ratios and other five areas for non-enrolling teachers, ERIP, benefits for TOC; it was a very, very significant improvement to the conditions of employment for teachers in British Columbia. The problem was, the bargaining team did not support the deal. The bargaining team was a team, comprised of some experienced negotiators, mostly people from locals, and some were from the other side of the political spectrum, and by vote of 5 to 3, they voted not to recommend the deal to the Executive.

[00:49:33] KK: That's a tremendous challenge for any leader—they said it wasn't enough, and what they didn't like was the zero, zero and two. Well, there was in my view, no way to break the zero, zero, two. Government was shopping for a union, who would buy that. As soon as that was in place, they were going to move, and everyone else would settle; and the question was, who would bite first, and, frankly, get the incentive of all the money that went with it. BCGEU came very close to taking it, and they couldn't deliver, they couldn't, in the end, take the risk of going back to members, and saying, we just got zero, zero, and two. I was of the opinion, that, that was worth going for, took it back to the team, the team said no, but the Executive voted by, I believe, about 8 to 3 vote, I'd have to check the record, it may not even be listed, but by a very substantial majority,—the Executive voted to accept the deal, that the bargaining team did not recommend.

[00:50:26] KK: The second part of the challenge was how to announce the deal, and if ever my inexperience and naiveté, and, perhaps, stupidity manifested itself, as it probably did, many times, that was probably the number one time. So part of the understanding was, as soon as the deal was announced, government has set a deadline at which we had to agree to this, or they were going to go back to the table with BCGEU. And I took that seriously. I think we could have

stretched it out a bit, but there were, in my view, far too much (risk). There were about 1250 teaching jobs on the table, and I was not very willing to walk away from that. I will tell you, that although it sounds like I was fighting my Executive, I wasn't, and the Executive was pretty united. And the staff, and, particularly, Elsie McMurphy, who was the Executive Director, and Ken Novakowski, the Director of Bargaining, were very supportive of this, and understood, this was nothing to walk away from. But, the understanding was, as soon as we agreed, and we agreed, I think, it was the 7th of April, the day before the deadline; the understanding was, I would then go and hold a press conference with the minister Paul Ramsay and the Premier. And we would announce the deal.

[00:51:46] KK: And I made the decision, and I'm not sure how thoughtful I was at the time, that that would not be told to the Executive. The Executive did not know, that I would leave that meeting on the conclusion of that decision, that will adopt the deal; go downtown, and before the media cameras, announce the agreement, that's been reached in the K-12 sector, the first agreement in that round of bargaining. And, we also, by the way, had a late-night, read the thing over. And I can't remember how long we spent, but Ken, Elsie, Brian Porter, Ray Worley, our chief negotiator, and I spent hours, wee hours in the morning the night before in a hotel room downtown, trying to nail down the final elements of this deal, which included, by the way, even though it was announced as zero, zero and two, it had zero, two and zero—the 2% actually came in April of the second year, rather than in the beginning of the third year, which was a small amount of money in people's

[00:52:38] KK: pockets.

[00:52:39] KK: So, in the end, when the deal was announced, the Teacher Viewpoint went nuts, they said, first of all, you're in bargaining, and several times, at the AGM, and prior to the deal in March, again, at Rep Assemblies, they said, you must tell us what's going on. When we were in committee, every meeting was in-committee, and I simply said, if this body tells me to reveal what's going on, I'll do so. But, understand, the minute I do that, it's over. I'll tell you we're making good progress on the objectives of the Federation. In every meeting the membership voted to continue the process by not demanding, that I explain—or Ray Worley, who would have been actually, the one to tell them—explained what was happening at the table. It was, again, very unorthodox, but, what was, I think, required in the circumstances. So, when I went on television, the Viewpoint said, you got a back-room deal, and it was a deal between the Federation and the government, and the BCPSEA did not know anything about what was going on, or

[00:53:47] KK: the employer, they had no idea what was happening at the bargaining table—they heard it at the same time everyone else did. And, that was a very difficult charge to fend-off, but the agreement was then submitted to the membership, and in the time, between the vote and the announcement, Teacher Viewpoint launched a very strenuous opposition to the deal. They had something, called, "10 Reasons to Vote No"; and lead by Surrey, Nanaimo,

Vancouver Elementary and others, they really told the members, it's a terrible deal, you really have been sold-out,

[00:54:22] KK: the language

[00:54:23] KK: is all

[00:55:03] KK: big loopholes, you can drive a truck through, and you'll get nothing from this deal. And, notwithstanding that campaign, it was approved by the voter vote, 74.5% to 24.5%. And more significantly, the BCSTA, school boards, voted overwhelmingly against the deal, that's how good it was, the employer said, what have we got ourselves into? And, even though it was fully funded, the money was actually put into a separate account, and it was a very, very well-funded deal. Only Victoria among the 75 school boards supported the agreement, which in my view, shows you, that any employer by 97% says, we don't like it, it's a pretty good deal. But, I think, that sealed my presidency. I was pretty aware that the risk was there, by that time. I said, I may be a casualty of this, but if I were to be a casualty, it doesn't matter. This was a very, very significant agreement, in fact it was so significant, that, when the Liberals came into power, they had quickly tried to undo it, and of course, that's the subject of a case, that I expect, any day, we will hear. The court ruled, that the government acted illegally, when it stripped the language in

[00:55:43] KK: 2002.

[00:55:44] WA: It is quite the contrast, too, in terms of funding the contracts—fully funded, money in a separate account for the various items...

[00:55:53] KK: Yes. And what was critical, of course, the government now put a lot of money in education through the collective agreement—they put a \$100 million a year, but they take it out of another pocket. So, the cuts that go through by not funding EI or Hydro, in fact, the budget, which is over \$5 billion has \$6 million more, more money, than a year ago, but, meanwhile, another \$100 million in pressures cut by another cost. And, this was not a golden age, there was a very tight funding for schools,

[00:56:32] KK: tremendous pressure on teachers, because of integration of the special needs students, and to put those (newly negotiated) ratios in, and sure, they were tremendous ratios—ESL, Learning Assistance, Special Needs, Resource teachers—for a few years we had some pretty good resources.

[00:56:48] WA: So, the next question—seventeen years later, thinking back, on that 1998 process: your reflections on it? I guess, there are two parts of it—the deal itself, and the process.

[00:57:02] KK: The deal... the only thing flawed about it, is it couldn't be reached at the table. And, I am not certain, that reaching the deal at the table... there is an old saying in labour—keep your eye on the prize. And prize is the deal, not the process. And, I think if there is something that differentiates Teacher Viewpoint from teachers for United Federation, was that we were

more pragmatic. The prize was the deal, and not the process. Teacher Viewpoint very much emphasized the process, and it's not what you get, but rather whether you play the game the right way. So, I don't think there was no deal at the table, and, in fact, there had been two deals at the table in the 26 years of teacher bargaining. The deal, where, I would argue, the Federation had to take a deal, because they threatened to legislate something much worse, that was the deal in 2006,

[00:58:00] KK: where it was one minute before midnight June 30th, the Federation accepted an agreement, that they would never accept it in any circumstances. Then, the deal—the most recent deal, which was; and, in fact, the deal in 2011 was sort of that way too—they were facing a demand, that the government would strip the contract by legislation, so the Federation said, well, we'll agree to do it. The most recent deal was also negotiated, one could argue, but it's negotiated with a regime, or model which is so much favouring the employer. So, I think, the end justifies the means there. Politically it was not very good. It is a very hard thing to sell to a membership, that values their involvement in the process, and I think they were shut out of it. Could it have been done—could we achieve the end another way? I don't think so. I think it could not have been done. I'll give you one interesting side, by the way... I then asked one day, one of the members of the bargaining team on the other side, who wanted a deal very much, why they walked away from the table in February, only to come back again in April.

[00:59:26] KK: They said, we didn't want you to lose the AGM—and I was shocked, that government would pay that big an interest in who ran the Federation, but they knew, that if the deal came through while I was President, I would have lost that election. And, they were right. But, that was interesting. So, the content of it—it didn't happen because of me, it happened because a team from the Executive, to the head of bargaining; to the leaders on the negotiating team, and the caucus, that knew, this is the way to go. And, so I was the spokesperson for it, and I supported it, but there was no way, that this was a one-person show. We were unsuccessful in the long-run of defending that process a year later. And, of course, you can always say, we could have got more, you can always say you could have got in a better way, but I feel somewhat vindicated, that in the 15 years that's gone by since that deal, now it's (been) 17 years—no process had generated as much for teachers,

[01:00:28] KK: as that contract did. Now you have to give credit to the government; I remember, the next summer there were all sorts of ads in the paper for teaching jobs, that hadn't been there for 15 years. Wanted a kindergarten teacher in Metro Vancouver! Wanted an ESL teacher in Delta! When I started teaching, you'd open up the Sun, there'd be 5 pages of teacher ads every year, there hadn't been ads like that in years. And we actually made a collage for Glen Clark and gave it to him, we said, this was tremendously important. And the government wanted that to happen too, and I give great credit to Paul Ramsay, but more, I think, to Glen Clark, who understood, that this was a socially positive policy, that was going to have great dividends, and I've talked to Glen since then, and, I think the Liberal government knew how good it was too, and that's why they got rid of it. It was an expensive proposition to maintain.

[01:01:23] WA: Question—can you go back to something you’ve said before about social justice, and you’ve referred to the number of issues that the Federation had been dealing with. Your immediate predecessor, Alice McQuade is no longer with us, so I will ask you a question that could be appropriately put to her. You were on the Executive at the time. And it has to do with the homophobia issue, as it was a very significant issue that the Federation took on at the time...

[01:01:35] KK: Very big.

[01:01:47] WA: I just wondered if you could comment on it, Federation’s role in it; what it meant for the students, and what it meant for education?

[01:01:59] KK: Well, the issue this week, as we’re speaking; the issue in the news, is the advances made for trans-gender people, and the coming-out of Bruce Jenner. And, it is hard in 2015 to know what things were like in 1997. That was a difficult issue, and a similar one the Federation faced was on its decision not to back the criminalization of abortion. And we had members, at the local associations and the AGM, deeply opposed to women’s right to choose. And we had in 1990’s, vehement opposition, not outside the Federation, but within the ranks of the Federation, for something we would say, that gay and lesbian kids (should) see themselves in the curriculum, that there are gay-straight alliances, that there are books and resources, that pick families in all the diversity they are. And the Federation came under a great criticism for that, from inside and from the outside. The big issue of the day was Surrey school board had a teacher there, James Chamberlain, a courageous kindergarten teacher, who had three textbooks that the Surrey school board thought, in its wisdom, to remove from the use in classrooms.

[01:03:23] KK: And all these books were simply...— the story was, the kids in the book had same-sex moms, or dads; and when the case happened, the BCTF was very supportive, so that issue, about social justice brought on the social justice umbrella, as opposed to specific discreet programs, which, I thought, didn’t have room financially, or politically, for homophobia. It was really in Alice’s last year and into my first year, was when that really came to be. And I was very proud of the Federation, when it said, these are the kids we are talking about, it is their lives; there are only teachers, nobody else—school boards won’t be taking the lead—only the Federation can take the lead now. And, to its credit, the Teacher Viewpoint was equally enthusiastic about those cases—no division in the Federation leadership about taking those things on, but, I think, it would not have happened as effectively, had we not re-defined the social justice focus in the Federation. There was another, Children’s Rights committee, which was, sort of, a third wheel; both, the anti-racism and the women’s programme really took up a lot of money by the support, for meetings and things like that.

[01:04:45] KK: So, it was good, in my view, it was a great moment for Federation to advance those issues.

[01:04:51] WA: are there any other highlights from your time as President that we had not covered yet?

[01:04:57] KK: I remember, Ken Novakowski being a very important mentor for me. He called me Mr. President, when I was President, which elevated my status more than anything else. There are some things I think back; I remember one thing, when it was announced that I had lost by some 30-something votes to David Chudnovsky. And David is a friend of mine, and I put a lot of regard for him, and he's just a very good man. And, I remember giving a speech—my concession speech—and I was saying to them, that I hope that I never embarrassed you. You know, to have the responsibility to speak for 43,000 teachers, they're unbelievable people. Teachers are just... our members work hard, they are just great people, they deserve much better, than they get, they don't ask for a whole lot in return; but the President, who represents them, has the responsibility of depicting them as they are, which is hard to do, because they're better, than you can ever say. And, the first thing that came to mind, was, God, I hope I never embarrassed you. And, someone said, if I had given that speech in my campaign, I would have won.

[01:06:09] KK: But, I said, no, I had to concede, but I feel today tremendously privileged, that I, a social studies teacher in West Vancouver, who didn't really pay his dues, who didn't really come up through the ranks, the way many people did, I've had many highlights in my life, and nothing can compare with the honour of representing teachers in British Columbia. It was a tremendous privilege. And, another thing that one realizes very quickly, that the honour is the organization, not the person. Presidents come and go. And the day you're not a president, you have nothing, in terms of that clout, that status, that prominence, that comes from being. So the day that I left, David got all that burden, and all that influence; and the day that Alice left, it all transferred to me. And, so you're humbled by it, you realize that the organization had almost one hundred years of advocacy for kids, of advocacy for dignity and rights for teachers, the work it does in social justice has made a tremendous contribution, and I'm very honoured to have been a part of it. It also helped me—I learned a lot, and

[01:07:22] KK: I joke, because in my post-presidential life I've done some things, which have in many people's view, not honoured the Federation. I went on to become the head of the College of Teachers, and in my view, of the role of professional regulation, I found myself both, publicly, and, organizationally, at odds with the BCTF. But it in no way diminishes my respect for the organization, and I wish one day, that (situation) would be understood, because I think, that it is not well understood. But I continue to hold the organization and its membership to a very, very high regard, and, again, I am both, honoured, and in some cases, bewildered that I was ever given a chance to serve as President.

[01:08:07] WA: I think, we've touched on a number of these things, but one of the questions that we provided for you, was one about the greatest challenge during your presidency. Do you want to add anything more to what we already talked about?

[01:08:17] KK: No, unless I ask, if, perhaps Ken remembers other issues. For me, the dominant issue, certainly, in the last year, was the collective attempt to get a contract. It was just such a huge, all-consuming task. The social justice, and the one on amalgamation, just continued... And an ongoing one, that, I think, every president faces, is how do you deal with government? Not

only did I take on the Federation, and the College, I also took on the government. And the government...—I ended up becoming being the second person, according to my lawyer, in history of Canada to be fired by government, that didn't employ him. They fired me by legislation, but I thought, just a minute—you can't fire me, I don't work for you. I am employed by the board. They did it anyway. And now, I find myself the head of an organization, which is representing principals and vice-principals; while all the power lies with government. The power of the parliament in our system is supreme; and whether you best deal with the government by being assertive, aggressive, threatening and adversarial, or whether you deal with them by being, in some way, an inside partner.

[01:09:30] KK: I was fortunate, because I was President during an NDP government. But even then, that question was for the members, because the members, or activists—I'd say, activists first—have different views about that. And, I think, the government has been more ruthless, than it was before, the government is, by philosophy, much less inclined to do the things, that, I thought, governments sort of knew, and that's to mitigate some of the inequalities in the world. The government now... the most recent federal budget is a massive transfer to people, who have more. And, our provincial government is not much different. So, how do you engage people? The "number one" job of a leader, whether it's a leader of a principals' organization, or any other interest, is to advance the interest of the members. The earlier history of the Federation, way back in the 1970s, this union deserves a great credit for over-throwing the Social Credit government, Bill Bennett. Or, W.A.C. Bennett. But the history doesn't re-play itself out. The circumstances change, so the struggle for every union, is how to negotiate the politics in time. I was fortunate, because, I think, we had a government, that, I think, was in line with what essentially, we were trying to do, but it didn't have the resources to do it.

[01:10:51] KK: So, nothing, but changes.

[01:10:56] WA: As you left the presidency in 1999, and since then you looked back at that time, what was your most satisfying accomplishment?

[01:11:04] KK: The deal—the deal of 1998, without a doubt. I can't say it went as I expected, but I thought, it was, in the end, remarkable. I remember going to a meeting. I had to call Ken Georgetti, who was the head of the BC Federation of Labour, and, ironically, both our unions had strikes of our staff at the time, and we were sort of, commiserating. And, I had to go to Georgetti—we were not at that time affiliated with the BC Federation of Labour—so we were invited, Ken Novakowski and I, to go to the BCFED meeting and to introduce to the affiliates our deal. Remember, no other public sector union had settled at that time. I go out there and introduce the agreement. What we had was this presentation of all the things we got; I was greeted—and these were friends of mine, who lead those unions, and good people—they did not receive me very well, because the union movement was determined, but not very co-ordinated in breaking the mandate of zero, zero and two. And I gave this presentation—absolute silence. They're just sitting there, stone-silent,

[01:12:18] KK: and then Georgetti said: “Is there anyone at this table, who would have turned down that deal?” And then, one hand claps, and then, more hands, and they end up applauding it. And I thought, that was a very satisfying moment, because I was not an insider. I was once asked by the former deputy minister, who was the deputy minister just before I was President, Donald Wright; and he got involved in the report to the Liberal government about collective bargaining in BC. And he came to talk to me once and said: “How do you ever get to be President of the Federation, you don’t fit the mould?” And that was very satisfying to me, that moment. And the other (moment) was, when it was over. I remember, I was elected in March and took office in July of

[01:13:07] KK: 1997.

[01:13:11] KK: I remember feeling tremendously hesitant, and I remember I had a real anxiety, almost anxiety attacks, how can I do this? Nothing I’ve done prepares me to be the head of this respected union, and to be a representative of 40,000 teachers. I was losing sleep, I was having, maybe, panic attacks, I don’t know. And then, I arrived, and then I realized—you know, relax, I had 120 people working for me to make sure, that it all goes well. And then I had a meeting with the deputy minister. And, in those days, the model was politician to politician; bureaucrat to bureaucrat, so the Executive Director, Elsie McMurphy would deal with the deputy, and I would deal with the minister. And I went to the meeting, and I said, no, I want to take this—take on this meeting. And, there was some resistance, but I lead the meeting, and I prepared for it, and at the end of the meeting, Elsie and Ken, who are the two people, you know, to me, are the models of leadership in the union during my lifetime, said that I’d done very well. And that they were, I think, surprised, that I had covered the areas as well as I had. And that gave me confidence,

[01:14:28] KK: that I didn’t have until that meeting. And I said, I can do this, and then, when it was over, I said, my god, I served two years, the empire hasn’t fallen, it survived me, and that gave me some relief. And I look back, and I think, I’m very grateful. Very grateful for that opportunity. Nothing in my life—if I won a Nobel Prize ever, which won’t happen, I would think, that would probably be the second-best thing that ever happened to me.

[01:14:56] WA: Can you tell us some about how your involvement with the BCTF played out after you left the presidency?

[01:15:02] KK: I went back to West Vancouver, taught for a couple of years, then went back into the local presidency and maintained an activist role. I was at every AGM, we were very active, actually. I forgot to mention, and I am sorry, I should have—another highlight for me was getting involved in Cuba. So, in 1997 Alice McQuade went to Cuba, after her AGM, for a vacation, but had a brief meeting with the President of Cuban Teachers’ Union. And, then she said, I made a commitment for you to go down and follow-up, because there is something that we can do together. So, I went down at Christmas of 1997 for December 21st, which is Teachers’ Day in Cuba, during which they honour

[01:15:48] KK: the anniversary of the Literacy Campaign in 1961. And I was presented with a medal of honour—a medal, given to outstanding teachers, and got engaged in Cuban education. From that discussion, their General Secretary, a man, named Luis Abraio, we developed a program initially to send teacher-tourists, or people, who went to the beaches, get them in touch with teachers, provide teaching materials to the central organization, called ECAP, and to take minutes of their meetings, because with the embargo they had very few resources. And I kept going back, in fact, I went back again the next year, and then, with Guillermo Bustos, who was our French language co-ordinator in the association, that was Spanish-speaking, we developed a program to teach ESL methodology to Cuban teachers, which went on for about 10 years. While I was there, there was an ongoing work in South Africa, I continued to encourage, that David and Larry Kuehn continue to play a role in Cuba, because I had put in so many years there. The Federation's international work was a great reward to me—both, during my time, the full development of SADTU as an independent, multiracial trade union in South Africa; the relationship in Cuba, which then expanded into other places in Latin America—very satisfying.

[01:17:18] KK: Now, the other question was.... Get me back to the other question—I forgot...

[01:17:22] WA: What was your role with the BCTF after

[01:17:25] WA: presidency?

[01:17:41] KK: Aha. So—I found myself, because I was defeated, and the Teacher Viewpoint morphed into something, called The Coalition. The Coalition was essentially, Teacher Viewpoint, and the locals would abandon our party, because of amalgamation, primarily. And that became a majority. To this day, there'd been only Coalition, or Viewpoint/ Coalition presidents. So, I ran for President in 1999 and lost,

[01:17:58] KK: and the question in the caucus was, who would run in 2000. And my Vice-President was a woman named Grace Wilson, from Nelson, and Grace didn't want to run. And, she said, we're going to lose. We'll probably lose (although), only one incumbent had lost, we said, you have to run; and she said, not going to run. So, the next in line was a woman from North Vancouver, named Linda Watson, very astute person. And, she said: "OK, I'll run". I said, you can't run. If we lose Grace, because she won't run, if we lose you, there is nobody else. Its better if I run and lose, than if you run and lose. And the caucus debated, and the caucus said, you run. So, I ran against David again, in 2000, and by, not a lot, but lost nevertheless, and that was my last attempt at provincial office. Then I was very active in the Federation, I guess, as a member of the not-so-loyal opposition, because I continued to believe, that the matters of amalgamation needed to be addressed.

[01:19:08] KK: I had a number of concerns on a number of other issues, but the one that really had caused grief to me, was over the control of the BC College of Teachers. I'd served on the board in 2004, I ran for the council of the College; Alice McQuade was already on—so, two presidents, and in 2003 Christy Clark, as minister has dismissed the College council, and taken it over and appointed 20 people to run the College. Two of our members, but mostly, non-

members. And the Federation withheld their fees, I withheld my fees at the time, and we succeeded in persuading government into giving the College back to the teachers on the diminished control basis. So, the once 15 elected members went down to 12, which ensured, that the teachers didn't have adequate control over the by-laws, because that required two thirds. I learned very quickly, I've come to learn through reading other things, what self-regulation was, and came to believe, that the College was best governed independent of the BCTF. Not to diminish the BCTF, but regulation—professional regulation—the 30-some odd regulatory bodies in BC required clear differentiation between the advocacy, done by union, and the regulation, done by the regulatory body. That there is a public interest in one, and there is a member interest in the other.

[01:20:36] KK: So, I quickly established my independence. I have been elected, we had a debate whether to run as an endorsed candidate, so I ran as an endorsed candidate, I have consulted a number of my people, whom I go to for such advice; and immediately, upon having me elected, I said, I am not going to be a part of the caucus anymore. I am going to sit as an independent member of this council. That was not very well received by the Federation at the time, and then in 2009, much to my surprise I was appointed the Registrar of the College, the previous Registrar retired; and the council, dominated by the Federation, appointed me, and I told them in the interview, that if they wanted an independent body, I'm the guy. They didn't, but I think they'd prefer to hire the devil they knew, than one they didn't know, as the other two candidates were former Superintendents, and, I think, the blood is thicker, than water, (it) persuaded them to hire me. And I proceeded to try to advance the Federation, the College and better the both organizations. Again, the Federation has a very important role to play, but it cannot—cannot—run the regulatory body.

[01:21:40] KK: It's supposed to be regulated by the regulator. So, that was an issue, that, I think, really made the Federation rather uncomfortable with me, because I was not just a teacher, I was the one, who had once been the President. That was a difficult time, I am sure, the Federation was not very happy about the things, and it caused me no great pleasure, but I tend to be a fairly thick-skinned person, and I did what I did. So, but, again, I remain a great admirer of this union, I am proud of its history and my small contribution to it, but I do sometimes disagree with what it does, or, rather its leadership, which is a kind of a different thing, than the Federation itself.

[01:22:22] WA: One of the things I know about you, and my more recent contact with you was through the holocaust education. And I know, it's a passion of yours; it wasn't one of our formal questions, but I'd like to give you an opportunity, if you'd like to, to put something on the record about your involvement

[01:22:38] WA: in it.

[01:23:20] KK: I'd be happy to. So, my great grandfather, whose name was Moritz Krieger was born in 1846 in the town of Oświęcim, which is best-known for its German name, which is

Auschwitz. So my family comes from what was Austria-Hungary, then became Poland; and I come from a very non-observant Jewish family. One of my father's cousins, his brother's daughter survived Auschwitz and, actually, she was one of the 300 women, who was on Schindler's list. So, she came to Vancouver in 1948, and I came here 18 months later; I grew up with her stories. So, my family history made me aware of the history of the holocaust. When I started teaching, I had a colleague, whose name was Dave Wall, and he was a wonderful social studies teacher, a brilliant, brilliant teacher, asked better questions, made kids more uncomfortable, than any other teacher I had ever seen, and I used to spend my prep in his class, and he taught about the holocaust. In one class, I said, I know about this. And I said, why don't I bring my cousin to talk to your class? I brought my cousin, she talked to them, and then I thought, I am going to make sure, when I'm able to teach the History 12, I will have that as a part of my focus, because it raises many important questions about responsibility, and in the case of a rescue, for example, why good people emerged in a very tough time.

[01:24:02] KK: So, through the Vancouver Holocaust Centre I'm on the Education Committee, I am participating in the Holocaust History Project, I give workshops, symposia around the province; have been doing that for 30 years, I've written about it. And my daughter, who's now the Executive Director of the Holocaust Centre, so that's something very near and dear to me.

[01:24:20] WA: So, as we're getting near the end here, is there anything else, you'd like to comment about your time here, at the BCTF?

[01:24:28] KK: I think we were very thorough; I think we covered a lot. I think my commentary lasted as long as my presidency. Ken, do you remember anything that you'd think I've left out? I think I want to talk a bit about the staff.

[01:24:39] KN: I was going to ask you about the staff, and also, that strike, and if that was playing any role at all in your

[01:24:48] KN: time here.

[01:24:56] KK: It's ironic. So, there was a labour dispute, and the Federation has two unions, then they were the Administrative Staff Union; and UTFE, which is the Union of Teachers' Federation Employees.

[01:25:04] KK: And they've had several different manifestations, and in collective bargaining, it's very tough to be a union that is an employer of unions, because there is an expectation, quite reasonably, that you're the best employer in the world. And, bargaining over the years had been, essentially, a major... an offering, as opposed to... basically, everything was given, with the exception of a few quite extreme things. And it was a difficult thing, to bargain. So, the union's strategy was to do, a sort of, work-to-rule, where they'd come to work, and do some of their job and not lose any pay.

[01:25:47] KK: And that was a very difficult thing for the Federation to endure, and the Executive decided, no we can't have what was being asked, and, in the end there was this decision to lock-out the employees. To lock them out, and then to deduct 10% of their salary. It was not well received at all; it was very much a point of attack from Teacher Viewpoint; that, ironically; and I remember, at the RA, not much longer after David Chudnovsky was President; he was also engaged in a similar dispute, and ended up with even more draconian tactics. I remember standing up and saying: "David, I wanted to tell you, I wish you were half as supportive of me as I'm going to be of you right now". It was a terrible thing—the worst thing is, these are people that are very, very dedicated to the Federation. The administrative staff comes largely from people, who were members, who worked, as we had, in locals, and they worked very hard for the Federation. And they're the people, whom we depend upon tremendously to get the work done. It doesn't happen without the staff, without their help. And I overcame my panic and anxiety, when I realized, how many people were determined and lined-up waiting, and if I make a mistake, and then I'd quickly be covered up by them, and atoned for...

[01:27:03] KK: But, having said that, you're responsible to manage the association, and the question became, will the association want to be managed within its means, and, secondly, will the ability to manage the Federation remain in the hands of the elected officials. And, it's a value judgement. I remember there were relationships in Federation, which never were repaired after that. There were people, who have been life-long friends, who never could continue as they had before, because it was very, very painful. As I said, the BCFED had a strike at the same time with staff, it sometimes happens; I don't know, I think, of all the reasons that, I think I was defeated, it's not near the top, and I didn't lose by a lot... The damage was more internal, than political, it really was more to do with managing a union like any other (body)—it has to be cohesive, there has to be mutual respect; and looking back, I think, the problem was, management team did not communicate well with the staff during the strike. Hard to do. Hard to do. But, it was a failure,

[01:28:19] KK: what can I say; you should never have a strike, but sometimes you have to have one, and I don't know how that could have been avoided, but it was not a happy occasion at all. One day we should debrief that one, Ken. Because I remember you were devastated, that was a very tough time. That was the worst part of my presidency that was by far the worst thing. That was the worst thing.

[01:28:42] WA: Especially, after having worked with them, as colleagues, too...

[01:28:46] KK: I was on the bargaining team. But you know, you see the world through a lens. My career has been very interesting, because not many people have, by virtue, of failing have had as many opportunities to lead in places, as I have. And the system is immensely complex, and everybody has a role to play. I've gained a lot of respect for almost all, and everybody who works in the system, and, understandably, doing the best they can with different priorities. The only group that I haven't found a way to think highly of right now, is the organized group of parents. I think, the parents have struggled to find an effective voice; they're not the voice of

parents, and that's frustrated the Federation a lot to find the voice of parents, who are really advancing education. But, I think, the Federation is a great organization, but it's like every organization,

[01:29:43] KK: it'

[01:29:44] KK: s sometimes inward looking. And education requires everybody to be on the same side; and, especially now, when there are so few kids in the system; it's a tough thing to do. I think, the leaders of this Federation now, with the increasingly right-wing governments; the government purposely denying itself the resources it needs to govern; by cutting taxes; this leadership faces challenges, that I would never know how to deal with. And it's not just the Federation, it's the labour movement as a whole is in tremendous trouble right now, as well as its survival, and I don't envy anyone in this position right now.

[01:30:26] WA: Well, we did a bit of segue into one of the last questions we have, and that's your comment on the current state of affairs in education

[01:30:36] WA: in the province of British Columbia.

[01:31:12] KK: I have two conflicting views on it sometimes, because I did spend a lot of time working with Cuban teachers. And sometimes I'd say, you know, we can educate kids in BC with the resources we have, we can do it almost anywhere. Even though, the school funding is down, it is by most measures in the world, pretty good. And, I tend to be pretty global in my view, and I don't think it is sufficient to say, we can't do what we do, because the funding is not sufficient; and I worry, that over the last decade or more, that the continuous bargaining... Bargaining used to be something that took place in a bargaining season, and you'd stop bargaining, you'd take your contract that you had both negotiated, and you'd live with it. And you'd go on, and you wouldn't turn your attention to the conditions of employment until you went to the table again. Because bargaining in BC is so unproductive—across the public sector. Bargaining goes on, it's a 12-month-season, it never ends, and, even when you got a contract, you're saying, it's a lousy contract, there's not enough, and the shortcomings continue to be manifested in the system.

[01:31:49] KK: And, I think, the narrative for public education, in the public domain, is largely negative. It's a system that is so poorly funded, that the teachers can't do their job, and it's a deadly narrative... If there's going to be public confidence in public education, people will not put their money into something, which they think, is failing. We saw that the ongoing labour disputes have tremendous effect on public confidence, last year 5000 kids went into the private system, who would not have gone had there if there were no labour stoppages. That's a huge (number)—I don't know what that is, some 300 teaching positions? But more importantly, it's a further erosion. When I started teaching, 3% of kids in BC went to private schools. It's 14% now. That's not only because of the concept of choice; it's not because of underfunding; it's part of the narrative of conflict, which has been the sub-text of public education for 15 years. That tremendously concerns me. I also believe, that this is a government in BC now, the Liberal

government of Christy Clark, that has no agenda for public education. The least to say, they don't care; but they aren't out to kill it.

[01:33:04] KK: I don't think they're out to kill it—they just don't care; even on the top 100 of their priorities. It shows by who's in the Ministry now; there's no one there, or very few people, who had been in school. And my concern, is how do you turn that around, and I think there needs to be a coalition of the leadership groups and education, to stand up and say, our number one mission is to restore public confidence in public education. There is five years gone between now and that contract, and the narrative that continues to say, the system is not working, is depriving people in the public education. And I don't care what strengths we have now, but in the long-run—and I remember reading an article, that says, that when public education loses 10% of the population, or private school enrolment goes over 10%, the public education is lost. It's like two-tier healthcare—when you have enough people, who leave, that they no longer want to sustain it. We're 4% over that now. And I don't know whether it can be reclaimed.

[01:34:08] KK: Most recent government services plan says, there's four ways of getting an education in BC: there's public schools, independent schools, distributed learning and homeschooling. They're all in government's mind, absolutely equal. It doesn't say, the public education is the core. The distance learning, as it used to be for those kids, who by virtue of their physical condition or geography can't find a public school. The private school is really not the preferred route—it's for the kids, who come from heritage, that wants a religious education—they're all equal, and I frankly believe, that the government doesn't mind people going to, both, distance education, or, even, homeschooling, frankly, because it's cheaper. And, I remain, even more so, than ever, sure, that the public education is the glue that holds our society together. There are so many societies that play on the failure to live with each other in a diverse world, even in the not-so-diverse world, I mean, look at the Middle East, look at India, look at Europe now... Europe, with not as strong tradition in public education, coming unravelled, because of the inability to live with ethnic diversity.

[01:35:16] KK: Canada has been better, than anywhere—we do it because of public schools. And I'm very, very, very worried, that that's gone. We can't look to government to bolster it, I think, we have to sit down with principals, with superintendents, teachers, trustees, and find a way to have the conversation; and change our narrative into a more positive one.

[01:35:38] WA: I have a question for all the interviewees: do you have any messages for the young teachers entering their careers right now?

[01:35:48] KK: I gave up my certificate a year ago, after 41 years. It's a mystery to me; it's so different. Teaching is... I go to schools on occasion; I went to a holocaust symposium at West Van Secondary, my old school a while ago, when I walk in classrooms, they look nothing like the ones that I taught in. They're technology-driven, they even situate this "personalized learning", which I have some problems with, has changed everything. Because I can't tell them how to do it, but I'd say, never give up the focus, that schooling is a social institution, not just a... We

educate kids for two reasons—to develop the personal capital, but really, really, to develop the social capital, to try and build a society. I worry, that education forum in British Columbia is losing the touch of that... I know that UBC has a great program, that focuses on social justice; I'm not sure that the other universities do, but I would say, remember, you're there to build a better society, not just to cultivate kids, who maybe, can get a better job...

[01:36:57] KK: I'll leave, though, how to do it is up to them, because I have no idea. I'd last 10 minutes at a school, with my own classroom.

[01:37:05] WA: Well, thank you very much for your time this afternoon—

[01:37:07] WA: it's been great...

[01:37:09] KK: I appreciate it.

[01:37:10] WA: And, it has been a great time chatting with you

[01:37:14] KK: Thank you. My pleasure.