



## **Making Room for Women Project**

**Interview with Arlene Kropp**

**August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020**



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## Oral History Recording Summary

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Interviewee: Arlene Kropp

Interviewed by: Kimiko Karpoff

Date of Interview: August 11, 2020

Location: By telephone

Transcribed by: Karina Greenwood

Auditor of Transcription: Arlene Kropp

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<b>Time Log</b> (minutes)	<b>Description of Content</b>
01:00	Beginning of Interview, introduction, permission
00:23	Early life and childhood in the church, CGIT, Explorers, camp
08:59	Moving to the new Gladwin Heights United Church, marriage to a United Church prison Chaplain, classes at VST
15:22	Being a charter member of Gladwin Heights, going back to school and getting a Master's of Pastoral care, volunteer ministry (weddings, memorials)
20:15	Technical difficulties
23:03	About her family, more technical difficulties, her children and the church, Naramata Centre
32:23	Being a woman in the church
34:52	Affirm projects at Gladwin, being at BC Conference when it was affirmed queer people had the right to ordination
39:07	Other formal roles within held at church, Gladwin Heights in the pandemic, highlight of life in church
44:15	UCW
49:17	Mentors and influences
52:15	VST, highlights of career
55:57	Final comments

# Arlene Kropp

1:05:20

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, worked, people, minister, congregation, attended, pastoral care, weddings, summer, united, abbotsford, vancouver, lived, continue, hear, chaired, charter member, trinity united church, camp, theology

## SPEAKERS

Arlene Kropp, Kimiko Karpoff

### **Kimiko Karpoff** 00:01

Hello, this is Kimiko Karpoff. It is August the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. And I am on the telephone with Arlene Kropp for the Making Room for Women Project with the United Church of Canada. Arlene, do we have your permission to continue with this recorded interview?

### **Arlene Kropp** 00:21

Yes, you do.

### **Kimiko Karpoff** 00:23

Thank you. So, Arlene, your name was given to us as someone who has been active in the United Church for a long time. But I would really like to begin by having you tell us a little bit about your early life. So, your life in the church as a child... were you someone who grew up in the church? If you could tell us a little bit about your family and your participation in that way?

### **Arlene Kropp** 00:56

Okay. Well, my parents did not attend church. And when I was five years old, the neighbours who attended West Point Grey United Church in Vancouver, asked if they could take me to Sunday School; they were very actively involved at the church. And my parents said, "Yes, that would be fine." So off I went with these people to West Point Grey United Church. And the interesting thing was, in order to get to West Point Grey United, we passed by the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, and the Catholic Church. And I've often wondered to this day, if my neighbors had belonged to any of those other churches, where I would be today.

When I got to Sunday School at age five, I was absolutely delighted to be there. I hadn't attended kindergarten. And I was really excited to be there with the little tables and chairs and whatnot. And I clearly remember, on the wall of the Sunday School class, a picture of the Good Samaritan with the injured man over the back, by donkey—a large poster—and on the other side, a picture of Jesus and the children. And I don't know how much that impacted my life, but I spent most of my life working with children and doing pastoral care. I attended Sunday School at West Point Grey, went to Explorers, and then later got very involved in CGIT [Canadian Girls in Training], and camping. And I think my

experiences with camping and the people I met, the leaders I met there, had a huge impact upon my life.

**Kimiko Karpoff 03:00**

So you started when you were five with the neighbour, and have you continued to be a participant in the church? All the way through to now?

**Arlene Kropp 03:10**

Yes. Not at West Point Grey, but other churches. Other United Churches.

**Kimiko Karpoff 03:22**

Can you tell me a little bit about what is Explorers and CGIT?

**Arlene Kropp 03:37**

Oh, okay. Well, Explorers was a group of young girls in the church; it kind of led up to CGIT. And I [was] probably eight years old to eleven, something like that. And CGIT was a very, very popular girls' group when I was young. It was started around 1918... [around] the end of the First World War. And it was Canadian Girls in Training, but it was Canadian girls and training for life. And we had a purpose. And there was - oh, back in the '50s, there were huge, huge groups of CGIT. I know one church in Vancouver had over 200 girls in the CGIT. That was back in the day when our United Churches were very large.

**Kimiko Karpoff 04:50**

And what kind of activities would you do in either or both Explorers and CGIT?

**Arlene Kropp 05:00**

It's hard to remember now, but I know that we put on a mother and daughter banquet. We did it on our own. And we met in CGIT in small groups (within the CGIT). And so there would be the total group, and then we would break into small groups and we would probably have a study. CGIT was very connected with summer camping as well. So we went to camp in the summer, and we did Bible study, we did outreach things in the church to help, and that kind of thing. And [that] was, in a way, kind of a lot of the growth. And [from] CGIT [we] went on to join UCW [United Church Women] later.

**Kimiko Karpoff 06:13**

I have two questions that are popping into my head. One is about your family. So you say your parents didn't attend church? How did they react then to you becoming so involved in the United Church?

**Arlene Kropp 06:33**

Oh they didn't mind. I actually ended up marrying a United Church minister. But no, they were okay with that. They just didn't go to church. They weren't church people. They were very good people. They had very, very high values but just weren't connected with the church.

**Kimiko Karpoff 07:02**

The other question that I had based on... You were talking about the camping. What camps did you go to? What were the camps back in those days?

**Arlene Kropp 07:11**

The camp that I was connected with was Ocean Park Camp, down near White Rock. And that was later changed to be called Camp Kwomais. But when I went back in the day, it was Ocean Park. I went as a camper. And then I went as a leader to a junior girls' camp. And then later, as a leader to intermediate and then senior. And so I was doing camp leadership and camp directing through my teens and as a young adult. Later on when I moved to Burnaby, I did CGIT at the church in Burnaby that I attended. And then when I moved to Abbotsford, I was the superintendent of the CGIT here. But CGIT later... there's a few CGIT groups left in Canada, but not many, because it kind of died out when they started doing co-ed groups in the church. And that kind of was the end of CGIT because girls would prefer to go to co-ed than just all girls.

**Kimiko Karpoff 08:41**

So as a young adult, you continued to be active in the church through these things like CGIT and camping. And did you continue to attend churches as well?

**Arlene Kropp 08:59**

Oh, yes. I had always been actively involved in - well, first of all [at] West Point Grey. Then [I] attended Dunbar Heights for a while. And then St. Paul's in Burnaby. And then Trinity United Church in Abbotsford. And then, since 1980, I was a charter member of Gladwin Heights United Church in Abbotsford. Gladwin Heights Church was started by Trinity Church. And I was asked by the New Church Development Committee if I would go to the new church and start the Sunday School. I said yes, and which I did. And since 1980, I've been involved at Gladwin Heights United Church in Abbotsford.

**Kimiko Karpoff 09:53**

You mentioned that you married a minister.

**Arlene Kropp 09:56**

Yes.

**Kimiko Karpoff 09:57**

Tell us about how you met, and, and your life as a minister's wife?

**Arlene Kropp 10:05**

Well, you know, I never was a minister's wife, because I met my husband when I was 18. And I had planned to become a deaconess and work in the church, right? But then I met my husband at 18, decided to get married, and he was studying for the ministry at that point, and [garbled] out well, I'll forget about being a deaconess. I'll be a minister's wife instead. But he dropped out of school for a while and worked in the prison system. And then he went back as a mature student, finished his degree. And then the United Church approached him and... because he had experience working in the prison system, particularly with addicts, the new prison was opening in Abbotsford. And the church

approached him and asked him if he'd apply to be the chaplain. And he never considered prison ministry, but he came out for the interview. And they said, "Why do you want the job?" And he said, "I don't, but I think I'm supposed to do it." So they hired him on the spot. He came back to Vancouver and said, "Guess what! We're moving to Abbotsford." In those days, the church used to send you. So we were expecting to be sent to Saskatchewan or Northern B.C., or whatever. So that's how we ended up in Abbotsford in 1966. But because he was prison chaplain, I never got to be a minister's wife. Even though when we were at Vancouver School of Theology, we had classes in how to be good ministers' wives. But that never happened [for me]. So then I just developed my own personal ministry in the church. And he did his ministry in the prison, and I carried on in the congregation, so I was involved.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 12:27

That is the actual first time I have ever heard that there were classes at VST [Vancouver School of Theology] for ministers' wives.

**Arlene Kropp** 12:35

Oh, there were, and they were given by Mrs. Taylor, who was the principal's wife. We were called Co-Theos. And a lot of the women... like, the husbands had come in after another vocation, right? And they didn't want to be ministers' wives. And actually, I didn't mind becoming a minister's wife and I didn't become one, and a lot of them did. So it's kind of interesting. But, you know, we met and talked about the... because back in those days, they had manses, and all kinds of things, you know, and there [were] all kinds of pitfalls to being a minister's wife.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 13:28

They just taught you the pitfalls?

**Arlene Kropp** 13:32

Well, I mean, you lived in a manse, so it wasn't even your own home, eh? The church ladies were in charge of it. And so that was always a problem, but I never lived in a manse, so I didn't have that problem.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 13:49

What other things did they teach you about?

**Arlene Kropp** 13:55

In Co-Theos?

**Kimiko Karpoff** 13:56

Yeah.

**Arlene Kropp** 13:57

Oh, I don't know, a lot of it was talking and sharing feelings. That kind of thing, too.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 14:07

As you say, I guess if some of the women had trepidations about being a minister's wife, there was probably just lots of opportunity to share together their anxieties or concerns or questions. Oh, interesting. Well, I find it both interesting that those existed, and that I have never heard of them before.

**Arlene Kropp** 14:35

Oh, interesting. Well, any ministers' wives [still] around that are in their 70s and 80s can tell you about Co-Theos.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 14:49

Well, and you know, I guess quite a number of the women that I know who were ministers' wives were themselves deaconesses, including my grandmother. So they didn't attend, and they weren't necessarily from this area either. So, I don't know all areas.

**Arlene Kropp** 15:08

Oh yeah, well this was just a group at Union College. Yeah. Back in the day that would be in the... let's see... in the '60s.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 15:22

It makes total sense to have such a group. So you said you were a charter member of Gladwin Heights?

**Arlene Kropp** 15:34

Yes, that's right.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 15:36

Can you talk about that process of creating a new church and what your role was in that?

**Arlene Kropp** 15:46

Okay. Well, as I say, Gladwin Church was sponsored by Trinity United Church, they were wanting to... Back in the 70s, and so on, the west side of Abbotsford was very conservative. A lot of Mennonite people. And so anyway, they were wanting a congregation. They were wanting to present an alternative form of worship to that side of town. And so they formed a church committee. And the committee came to me and said, "Would [you] be willing to go and start the Sunday School at the new church?" And I said, "Yes, I would." So for two years, we met in a school. And then the church was built in 1982. And I did the Sunday School. And at one point, we had over 80 children in the Sunday School, which was amazing, compared to now; we don't even have a Sunday School.

But around that time, I had decided that it was time for me to go back to my plan A, which was to be a professional person in the church. I wanted to study theology. So when I was 51, I had been teaching school, for many years. [At] 51, I took a leave of absence, and I went to Vancouver School of Theology, and enrolled in the first year of the Master of Divinity program. Now, I wasn't planning to complete that program, I just wanted to take it for my own benefit for that one year, and I actually lived on campus, and lived in the tower at Union College, and attended class. I came home over the weekend, and just did that for the one year. But at the same time, they started another program, a two-year master's

program called a Master of Pastoral Care. So I enrolled in that program, but I went back teaching. And so I continued coming in and taking a course in the evening and so forth. I said I was on the nine-year program. I started out when I was 51, and I got the degree when I was 60. So then with that degree in pastoral care, after I retired from teaching, which I had by then, I did some part time work in the local churches when they needed someone. When there was some minister leaving or something like that, I filled in. I worked for Trinity United Church for a few months, and I worked for Gladwin off and on. But mostly I've done my ministry as a volunteer.

**Kimiko Karpoff 19:28**

So, when you filled in, were you filling in for just the pastoral care role, or were you also doing the pastoral care through preaching and other leadership?

**Arlene Kropp 19:45**

No, I didn't do preaching, but I had a licence to do weddings. I did a lot of weddings over the years. And I did a lot of memorial services over the years. I think I did about 50 weddings over the years [and] about the same, about 50 memorials.

**Kimiko Karpoff 20:11**

That is a significant ministry.

**Arlene Kropp 20:15**

It was very fulfilling. I also worked as a volunteer in the local hospital. And that was another way... I'm getting a beep.

[Technical issues]

**Kimiko Karpoff 20:44**

Okay. You were just talking about your role doing memorial services and weddings? And also - well, I don't know what the thought was that you were going to follow that with.

**Arlene Kropp 21:13**

I think that was it. I said that I did a number, about 50 weddings and about 50 memorials over the years. Those weren't always in the church. A lot of those were within the community. A lot of the weddings were children of friends of mine. So, in a sense, I was doing outreach work in the community, as far as weddings and memorials.

**Kimiko Karpoff 21:51**

So, you grew up in the church in a particular era, it was really the...

**Arlene Kropp 21:57**

I'm sorry, I'm losing you.

**Kimiko Karpoff 21:59**

You grew up in the church; are you -



**Arlene Kropp** 22:02

I can't hear you.

[Technical issues]

**Kimiko Karpoff** 23:03

I'm just collecting my thoughts again now. So you did talk about your children, you had mentioned that your children were helping you with your ankle now. Tell me a bit about your family?

**Arlene Kropp** 23:24

My own family?

**Kimiko Karpoff** 23:25

Yeah.

**Arlene Kropp** 23:26

Well, I have two sons and one daughter. And my one son is a lawyer in the Justice Department in Ottawa. And he has three children. One is 23. One is 18. But then he's in a second relationship. He has a two year old, which is kind of funny because he's 59 years old, and he has a two year old. But one of the things about Doug - his name is Douglas - that I didn't mention, in my own journey, is my connection with Naramata Centre. I have a huge connection with Naramata. But my son Douglas did as well. And he actually worked there two summers. And then when he was a young man, he went overseas with various different groups like Oxfam, and CUSO, and Canada Crossroads, and that kind of thing. And then [he] chose to go into law. So that was really, really important to him. And he has a law degree from Harvard, as well as one from Queens, and works for the Justice Department.

Now my second son Randy is a clinical psychologist. And he works with the courts. And he is in Vancouver. And my daughter, Ellen. Now he's married and has a 17-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter. ...See I'm getting that beeping again. You're not hearing that?

[Technical issues]

**Kimiko Karpoff** 25:48

You were just telling me about your second son.

**Arlene Kropp** 25:56

My second son, Randy, who is in Vancouver, he's a clinical psychologist and he works with the courts.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 26:10

And then you had one more child?

**Arlene Kropp** 26:12

And then I have a daughter. Her name is Sherry. And she is married; she has no children. And she's worked for London Drugs for 30 years.

**Kimiko Karpoff 26:25**

So when you talked about, like starting the Sunday School at Gladwin, as an example, where your children then also part of the Sunday School?

**Arlene Kropp 26:37**

By the time I was at Gladwin my children were grown up and moved away.

**Kimiko Karpoff 26:41**

Okay.

**Arlene Kropp 26:42**

But they did attend the Sunday School when I was at Trinity United. That had the Sunday School and youth group.

**Kimiko Karpoff 26:53**

You talked about Naramata as being a place that you had a connection to...

**Arlene Kropp 26:58**

Oh yes, I was very involved at Naramata and it had a great impact on my life. I used to go to Naramata; I'd say, "I have a cord in my hand." I'd go to Naramata, plug in, get energized to go back to the real world. So I went to Naramata many, many summers, I chaired the Program Committee, and I was on the board.

**Kimiko Karpoff 27:28**

What was your first introduction to Naramata?

**Arlene Kropp 27:32**

My first introduction to Naramata... that's a very good question. I think - I'd say my first introduction to Naramata was a friend of mine who asked me if I would go with her to Naramata to do a weeklong workshop for Sunday School teachers. And her name was Louise Rolston. And she was a very involved person in the church she was in. She was a minister's wife; she was married to Peter Rolston. And anyway, we went to Naramata and led this weeklong workshop for Sunday School teachers. So that was my first introduction.

**Kimiko Karpoff 28:26**

You led the workshop?

**Arlene Kropp 28:28**

Yes, we led the workshop.

**Kimiko Karpoff 28:30**

And what years would that have been?

**Arlene Kropp 28:34**

That would have been in the '70s. The early '70s.

**Kimiko Karpoff 28:45**

And so did you go there then with your family?

**Arlene Kropp 28:49**

Yes. Yes, and I went with my family for many summers. And then my kids would go on their own to what they called Youth Conclaves. And then Naramata had something called a Winter Session. My oldest son, Douglas, attended the Winter Session. And so did my daughter. She attended the Winter Session.

**Kimiko Karpoff 29:19**

Did your family have a favourite week in Naramata?

**Arlene Kropp 29:26**

I used to go to the Creative Arts Week. That was one of my favourite ones.

**Kimiko Karpoff 29:32**

I know lots of people would always go at the same time, and then they would get to know folks who were always there at the same time.

**Arlene Kropp 29:40**

Yeah, that often happened.

**Kimiko Karpoff 29:43**

And where did you stay at Naramata?

**Arlene Kropp 29:48**

Where did we stay? Oh gosh. Well, I've camped at Naramata, I've stayed in the Cottage Court. I've stayed in the East Court, I've stayed in the Orchard Court, I've stayed in the newer build.

**Kimiko Karpoff 30:11**

Oh, I've lost you. [Computer tone] I did have a wondering - you commented that Naramata - I can't remember the exact word you used - was formational? Or impacted you? How did Naramata impact you?

**Arlene Kropp 30:41**

Well, because Abbotsford is a conservative community, you get an awful lot of conservative theology here, not in the United Church, but just generally. So it was so wonderful to go to Naramata, which had such a positive liberal kind of theology and the energy, the positive spiritual energy that was there. So as I said, it was like taking a cord and plugging myself in so that I could come back and work in this

community. I kept going back summer after summer, and sometimes I would stay for three weeks. And then, as I say, I chaired the Program Committee for a few years and I was on the board. And so it had an impact on my life.

**Kimiko Karpoff 31:51**

Are you still connected to Naramata?

**Arlene Kropp 31:53**

No, I don't go anymore. And Naramata is not really functioning that well right now anyway. It's pretty well... some courses are online.

**Kimiko Karpoff 32:06**

Yeah, I saw - they do have music happening because they're live streaming it.

**Arlene Kropp 32:12**

Oh, are they?

**Kimiko Karpoff 32:13**

Yeah, they had Revolve there this week. They had Dawn Pemberton last week.

**Arlene Kropp 32:20**

Ah, okay.

**Kimiko Karpoff 32:23**

So you have a lot of different connection points. And this project is particularly, you know, capturing the stories of women who have been active in the United Church of Canada. And some women have had particular experiences *because* they were women in the church and I just wonder what was your experience of being, well a woman in the church? A mom, a working mom?

**Arlene Kropp 33:16**

I'm not sure how to answer that. I think [of] the pastoral care work that I've done over the years. Being a woman had a certain aspect to that – a caring, motherly kind of support in doing pastoral care work. Also, you know, teaching Sunday School all those years, I think the feminine side of working with children. Again, as I say, way, way back, way back at West Point Grey, the picture of Jesus and the children I think had an impact on my life, as well as the Good Samaritan with the injured man on the donkey. But how much of that I don't know. I just - I'm wondering about that. But I never had any difficulties doing my work as a woman in the church. I was never held back by anyone.

**Kimiko Karpoff 34:52**

I noticed that you seem to have been quite active in the Affirm projects at Gladwin United Church?

**Arlene Kropp 35:03**

Oh, yes. Okay, going back to pre-1988, I was on a committee with Ivan Cumming and some other people. And I actually went around the province doing workshops, pre-1988, at churches. Then I had

the opportunity to... It was 1987-88, that I went to university. So I actually worked on staff at Naramata that summer, and the BC Conference was over in Victoria. I finished up my work at Naramata and headed over to Victoria. I wasn't a candidate at General Council, but I sat up in the gallery when Marion Best brought forward the proposal. And it was so clever because what she said was that the committee that had been working on this all came to the agreement that gay and lesbian people had full rights to membership in the United Church. And if they had full rights to membership in the United Church, therefore, they had the right to ordination. And people came up to the microphone one after another, and said things like, "I was sent from my church in Nova Scotia to vote against this. I feel the Holy Spirit present here today; I will be voting in favour of the motion." And so I was present there when a decision was made. And, sadly, sadly, many people left our congregation. And many people left Trinity as well. But I've been very, very supportive. And one of my closest friends is a diaconal minister, who is a lesbian. In fact, I've had the experience of being in a group of women where I was the only straight one there. [Laughter] And that was fun. Anyway, so I've always been very, very supportive of the movements. So when we went through with the affirming, that was a very exciting time.

**Kimiko Karpoff 38:15**

And then locally within the Gladwin Heights congregation -

**Arlene Kropp 38:21**

Yes, that's where I am - we did that recently – fairly recently. Was it a couple of years ago now? Anyway, that was very, very well received. We have one trans member right now. We have had one - we did have a gay man a while ago, but he moved to Saskatchewan. So it's a very, very open, inclusive congregation.

**Kimiko Karpoff 39:07**

And what does your particular participation or what roles... Do you continue to hold formal roles in the congregation?

**Arlene Kropp 39:19**

Right now? Over the years I've been chair of the board more than once. I've chaired the Christian Education Committee, which no longer exists. I've chaired the Outreach Committee and the Pastoral Care Committee. Right now, I'm on the board as the pastoral care person.

**Kimiko Karpoff 39:52**

And how has Gladwin Heights been through the pandemic time?

**Arlene Kropp 40:00**

Oh, well right now, we have a cluster; we're part of a cluster. And so Sunday morning there's a service on Zoom. And it comes out of Trinity Church. But our cluster involves St. Andrew's in Mission, and Gladwin, and Aldergrove, and Mount Lehman. The different clergy participate, and people hook in on Zoom and have been doing that for a long, long time now, it seems – weeks and weeks. Our board doesn't know when we'll get back into the building.

**Kimiko Karpoff 40:53**

Are there any particular stories that you really want us to capture? What would you say [has] been the highlight of your life in the church?

**Arlene Kropp** 41:14

The highlight of my life in the church, I think was going back to university at age 51. That was a very exciting time for me. And just helped me to refocus my theology on my goals and working in the church. Yeah, that's probably the highlight for me. Also, as a young person, my camping experiences. And I've also thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed officiating at weddings. That's been really, really special. And in its own way, officiating memorials and funerals. That's been very important, too.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 42:26

When did you retire? You said you've retired from that?

**Arlene Kropp** 42:31

Oh, well, I haven't retired from the church. I retired from teaching. I retired from teaching when I was 56. Because - partly because my husband was already retired, but I wanted to focus more on doing my pastoral care work. And I did, so I did most of that pastoral care work after I retired from teaching.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 43:04

Do you continue to officiate at weddings and funerals?

**Arlene Kropp** 43:08

No, no, I haven't done any for quite some time. I no longer have the licence to do the weddings. That had to be granted yearly. I haven't got that now. And, although I did do one wedding not too long ago, had a local, what would you call it? ...Person who does weddings in the community? A friend of mine who had the license, so we did it together? So I did the religious part and she did the official part. That worked well. I've done that a couple of times. But no, I haven't been asked to do a memorial for some time. That's all right.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 44:04

Do you continue at this point to be part of any groups or boards or...?

**Arlene Kropp** 44:10

I'm on the church board.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 44:15

I note that you did not talk about UCW, which for people your generation would have been...

**Arlene Kropp** 44:24

Oh, yes. I'm a charter member of UCW. You said was Marilyn Harrison recommended me?

**Kimiko Karpoff** 44:34

I don't recall, actually.

**Arlene Kropp** 44:36

Yeah, you did. Anyway, when I was a young mom at West Point Grey Church. We were studying *The Word and the Way* with Marilyn, and they had babysitting; it was a morning group. And UCW was formed, and we were considered to be a UCW group. And so we were told at the time that we can say we were charter members of UCW. That was 1962, I believe. And, anyway, then I belonged to UCW at Trinity Church for several years. But at Gladwin Church I couldn't join the UCW because it met in the afternoon. And I was still teaching school at that time, right? Later on I joined the UCW. I'm very involved in the local UCW; we have a very nice group of young women, and we do meet in the day, because everybody that comes now is retired. Even the young ones. [Laughter]

**Kimiko Karpoff** 46:02

So you continue to meet as a UCW?

**Arlene Kropp** 46:07

Pardon me?

**Kimiko Karpoff** 46:08

You continue now to have a UCW?

**Arlene Kropp** 46:10

Yes. We still have UCW. We have about 15 members.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 46:19

What kinds of things do you do as the UCW now?

**Arlene Kropp** 46:23

We do things for the local church, like if there's memorial service, which we've done quite a few [of] in the last few years. If they ask us to do the lunch, and that kind of thing, we take care of that. And we also do outreach. We help in the community with... we give gift bags at Christmas to a woman's centre, and we make sandwiches for street people. So it's kind of a two-pronged thing: to the church itself (the congregation) and the community.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 47:15

So that's interesting that you continue to have a really active UCW.

**Arlene Kropp** 47:21

Yeah, I think a lot of the fact that the young woman – well, she's younger than me - but when she joined the UCW it was mostly elderly ladies, and she joined as a young person. And she wasn't working in the day, so she could join, right. And she's got a lot of energy. And she has carried on, and still continues to head it up. And we're quite informal, but - oh, we've even done a few church services from time to time when needed. But it's been very heartwarming that these younger women – and when I'm saying younger women, I'm saying and they're in their 60s [laughter] – as they retire from their jobs, come and join the UCW. I guess there's one other woman in her 80s, and I'm in my 80s. So there's only one other woman in [her] 80s. And all the rest are younger. And so it's really lovely. A lot of these very young

women that I've watched, grow up in the church, they were young mothers with young children, and now some of them are grandmothers. [Laughter]

**Kimiko Karpoff** 48:50

Oh lovely, that is lovely.

**Arlene Kropp** 48:52

Yeah it is, it really is. It's a real community. It's a real caring community, we do a lot of - it's almost become a support group, because at the beginning of the meeting, we have a sharing time. And we go around the circle, and people talk about their life. And so in a sense it's a support group, as well as helping group.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 49:17

That's so often the case with those groups. I wonder if there's any particular ministers or people in leadership who you encountered, who particularly you remember, maybe either influenced or mentored you?

**Arlene Kropp** 49:41

Are you talking women?

**Kimiko Karpoff** 49:45

Anyone.

**Arlene Kropp** 49:46

Okay. Back in the early days, I was highly influenced by a woman named Heddy Bartling and she was a diaconal minister, and she worked with the Japanese. She had the whole story about the Japanese being moved out of Vancouver, which was a terrible time. But she was a camp leader. And I was very, very impressed with her. She was very influential.

Another person who was very influential in my life with Barbara Howard. You may know of Barbara, she's an incredible Black woman, and she was a camp leader and she was very influential in my life. And then my CGIT leaders... I'm trying to think of names at this point... And then Naramata Centre, [I was] highly influenced by Ivan and Nina Cumming. And Jim and Jean Strathdee, wonderful musicians who I met at Naramata over the years and became very close friends with. And I loved their hymns, all the Strathdee hymns in the hymnbook. They live in Sacramento, and they were to come to Naramata this summer. I'm not sure what happened there. At Trinity Church, Rev. Bob Stobie was very influential as a minister. And then at Gladwin Church, Norm Thomas was very influential as a minister.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 52:15

When you decided to go back to VST, did you have to do a discernment process or have the support of your congregation to do that? Or were you just able to go?

**Arlene Kropp** 52:30



I just went because I didn't have any plan at that point to go into ministry. I just wanted to take the course, you know, so I didn't have to do any discernment. I just registered to take first year of the divinity course and thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it. It was when I was there that they created this new degree for pastoral care. So I thought, "Aha! That's what I want to do!" [Laughter] So I registered in that. But as I say, it took me nine years to finish it. I was 60 when I got it, and that's given me 25 years, just about.

**Arlene Kropp** 53:29

Wow. Are there any other particular things that you really would love to have captured here? Stories, people, moments, highlights of things, lowlights even, challenges?

**Arlene Kropp** 53:57

One of the highlights was being present when the vote was taken to allow gay and lesbian [church members] to become ministers, too. That was the summer of 1988. That was a highlight. And I think when I got my degree, that was a highlight. There were many, many high moments over the summers at Naramata. Many high moments... I can't think of any one in particular.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 54:55

You mentioned that you worked at Naramata for a season or a year?

**Arlene Kropp** 55:00

Just for a summer. I worked with the summer staff. That was the summer after I was at VST, and I needed to make some money. So... I didn't make a lot of money there. But that was fun. That was different.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 55:24

What was the role?

**Arlene Kropp** 55:26

My role was - I was supervising the summer staff. Naramata has teenagers that work in summer, as leaders. And I was supervising the summer staff. And I also was supervising the residents at Alberta Hall. So it was kind of a two-pronged job.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 55:57

Arlene, you have had a rich history in the United Church of Canada.

**Arlene Kropp** 56:02

Well, it's been extremely important to me. Particularly - the United Church, to me, is so important because it stands for inclusion, it stands for outreach. It stands for justice and a liberal theology. And living in the community of Abbotsford, which actually is much more cosmopolitan now than it was when we first moved here. But we moved here in 1966. It was very, very conservative, and a lot of conservative theology. There used to be almost a church on every corner. But having the United Church through my life has been incredibly important. I even met my husband at a - well, it was a Student Christian Movement dance; that's where I met my husband back in the day when I was 18. But

he was a theological student at that point. So the church has been very, very important in my life. And because my family were good people, but they weren't church people, so much of what I learned in the church, through CGIT, and camping and all that, became the basis for my own theology and my own lifestyle.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 57:57

Beautiful. Thank you for everything you've done for the church. And thank you for sharing your story.

**Arlene Kropp** 58:06

Oh, thank you.

**Kimiko Karpoff** 58:13

Yeah, it's been wonderful to hear. I'm sure that there are many more particular stories. But thank you for sharing the ones that we have heard today.

[End of interview]