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Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Donna Runnalls

Part One—Travels

June 1, 2015

Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Donna Runnalls (DR)
Date of Interview: June 1st, 2015
Transcribed by: Katherine Chambers

Interviewed by: Kaz Amaranth (KA)

Auditor of Transcription: Donna Runnalls

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KA: My name is Kaz Amaranth, and today it's June 1st, 2015. I'm interviewing Donna Runnalls as part of the Making Room for Women program at the United Church of Canada Archives. I'm glad to be here with you, Donna. Do I have your permission to proceed with the interview? 00:04

DR: Yes, you do.

KA: Thank you. Goodness, I'm really exciting to talk with you. We've been wanting to do this for some time and I'm so glad that you have time—that you can give us the time to do that. We had touched upon several things when we met and I'm wondering if you'd be willing to speak about—how do you think that your early life influenced your vocation? 00:51

DR: I grew up as the daughter of a United Church minister, so I was always active in the church, being in CGIT and things like that. And then when I went to university, I studied a course, which was unusual at UBC at that time, on Chinese history and that got me interested in Asia—in addition to which I knew a great deal about the Japanese in Canada and what had happened to them during the Second World War. I commuted to UBC which a Japanese girl in our car and got to know a little bit about the Japanese community. That aside, however, when I graduated from university, basically, women had three options [other than getting married and raising a family]: one was to be a teacher, a nurse, or a secretary. [I didn't want any of those, but] my mother, at that time, said, "I don't know what you're going to do, but you're not going to live here with us any longer."

KA: How old would you have been then?

DR: Twenty … in my early twenties, I think. Yeah, somewhere around 22. I tended to be the one in the family that was the least wanting to let go. Anyway, there was [a United Church advertisement] for young applicants to apply [for a three-year period to teach] English in Japan. That interested me very much because two years before that I had been at a work camp of the Student Christian Movement and I had met Rhoda Palfrey, who is the wife of Douglas Hall. She had [already been on a three-year appointment] in Japan and she talked about it quite a bit and it sounded kind of interesting. So I applied and I got accepted, but I didn't get accepted to go to Japan—I got accepted to go to Korea. I was somewhat disappointed by that because [I was interested in Japan]. Anyway, in order to prepare for that I had to go on a six-week training program—the United Church cooperated with the American Methodists—and this training program was in Nashville, Tennessee. [It] was very interesting, because [this program was using the racial question to introduce us to cross-cultural learning. This was in the 1950s before the movement led by Martin Luther King]. In other words, the Black-White question was used as a kind of background for what people going overseas were going to meet in whatever environment they were going into. In other words, how [was one] going to be able to relate to [their new] community.

KA: So this was a training that was kind of the Civil Rights Movement in the States that was helping to train people …

DR: No, no. The Civil Rights Movement hadn't even begun. No, this was the Methodist Church. [For the first weekend] they had rented a campsite for us to go camping, and that campsite was a Black campsite. And there were no Black students there, but there were Black staff, and they participated in our weekend program. [Each of us was assigned to a group of two or three. (I can't remember how big the group was but I think it was between thirty and fifty.) I was assigned to a group of three and we were assigned to attend, every Sunday, the same Black church. This] was very interesting to me, because after church we would be invited into a Black home for lunch. All of this was completely unfamiliar to me, because I wasn't used to the idea of the kind of conflict that was between the Blacks and Whites in U.S. And particularly, Nashville's pretty far south. Anyway, when [the camp] program was over, I met at that point, the other person who was going to Korea with me, Ramona Underwood. She was an older woman; she was probably in her early forties. She had been ordained in Saskatchewan, but they didn't really know what to do with her, I think, because I'm not sure how much enthusiasm, despite what's-her-name …

KA: Lydia Gruchy. That's only fifteen years later.

DR: Exactly. But they didn't seem very keen on woman ministers. (Laughs)

KA: So she was a bit at loose ends trying to figure out what she's going to be able to do …

DR: Right, right. So anyway we went off and that was a very interesting trip. I had gone home [to pack]; we had to take [with us] everything we were going to need for three years, [because it was only three years after the end of the Korean war and the country was devastated.] Now, you can't imagine how you're going to even work that out. How many clothes …

KA: To a place you'd never been.

DR: A place you'd never been. And we had to take our own furniture with us, so by the time I got [ready]—and then we crossed the Pacific on a freighter—I had seven pieces of baggage in the cabin and fifteen pieces of baggage in the hold. [Romana had the same.] And then we were off to Korea.

KA: So, 1956?

DR: Yeah, 1956. So, anyway, my three years there were very interesting learning. I was assigned to the English Department at Ewha Women's University, so while there were male teachers, there were no male students—they were all woman students. And the English Department had probably, I would think maybe … 09:06

well, one class. They had probably thirty or forty students in each year, in the English Department. So I was assigned to that Department and basically, I was teaching oral English one year. And then I was assigned to teach them English composition, which was really quite difficult.

KA: Why was that so difficult?

DR: Because their level of English wasn't always high enough for them to—I mean, they could construct sentences alright, but the whole concept of writing a paragraph and working the logic through it, was not too easy to convey. But I think they learned—I hope that they learned. The classes were also quite large—like I'd have forty students in a class. Now, for an oral class, that was really hard. And when I first arrived, I walked into my first class and I couldn't—I looked out and thought, "I'll never get to know them, because they all look exactly the same to me." Well, it's amazing what happens, because by the time I was leaving, I would look at somebody and they looked exactly like somebody from home and I'd think, "What are they doing in Korea?"

(Laughter)

DR: It was quite interesting. And then one of the things that happened was, I think because I articulate quite clearly, that I was asked if—by the Christian radio station—if I would give English lessons on the radio. So every week I went and recorded five half-hour lectures—or lessons—the idea was there was an assigned book.

KA: Was it the Bible?

DR: No, it wasn't the Bible; it was a book on English. (Chuckling.) Whoever listened supposedly had this book in front of them when I was teaching—and really teaching how to speak, how to pronounce words, and things like that. And then there was a group of high school students who came—now, I was teaching only women in the University, but this group of high school students were both boys and girls. And they came and asked me if I would meet with them every Saturday. So I would go and record in the radio station and then I would be with this group of high school students who wanted to practise their English. And one of the funniest things I remember is that they were trying to work on slang. I was teaching—I can't remember, but I must have said something about one slang expression was, "Oh, you're pulling my leg." And a couple of weeks later, one of the boys said, "Oh, you're pulling my leg off!"

(Laughter)

DR: And I could hardly contain myself from laughing. Anyway. It was kind of interesting. After my first year there, I was living with American Methodist women, who were also teaching in the University. Because the house we lived in was an old, Western-style house that had obviously been built by the Methodists, and they … after the first year, we had, next door to it, another

Western style house, which was designated as an English Practice House. So after my first year, the two of us who taught in the English Department moved into the English Practice House. There was a previous group of three-year teachers and they had gone home to the States, and then this older woman and I moved into the English Practice House. And what we did, was we had a—I can't remember the exact number, but it was really twelve to fifteen students moved in with us every month—like they changed, month by month. And we ate a Korean diet because they couldn't afford anything else. Sometimes it was really nutritionally lacking. The basic diet, at that period of time in Korea, was rice and a bowl of soup, often which was only vegetables, not made with any meat, and then usually a tiny little plate of greens, and that would be it. And that would be two times a day, and then the other English teacher and I, we had a Western breakfast, because a Korean breakfast was exactly the same as the other meals, and I think neither one of us felt we could start the day that way. Anyway, after a period of time, I was malnourished. I suffered from malnutrition. Luckily, the woman that I was teaching with—she was an American—she had gained, I think all the Methodists had, access to the post office of the American Army Post Office, so we could get—I could get packages through her, sent to me from Canada. I can't remember exactly how often, but my parents were sending me vitamins and all the stuff that needed to be added into my diet. It was, you know, aside from that, it was really an interesting experience. However, three years was coming to an end. I went under the Woman's Missionary Society, and one of the real difficulties that happened while I was there—and this, I think, is interesting for United Church history—is, previous to my arrival, but not very long before that, there had been a split happen in the Presbyterian Church because there was a Canadian, whose name I've forgotten, but it'll be well-known, a Canadian missionary, and then …

KA: And an American Methodist?

DR: No … the church, the Presbyterian Church, was all one—there were Americans and the Canadians involved. Now, this man and one of the Korean professors who had studied at Emmanuel College, they took a more liberal view of theology. And they were brought up on the carpet by the other Presbyterians and they were actually charged with …

KA: Heresy?

DR: Heresy.

KA: Really?

DR: Yeah, they were charged with heresy. And over that, a part of the Presbyterian Church, with the United Church missionaries, split. So that was the beginning of the … the Presbyterian Church in Korea designates the American Presbyterians; the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea designates that church with which we are associated.

KA: Okay.

DR: Okay. So that was the first step. The next step was that when I arrived, there was a young man who felt very strongly—and this is under the World Mission Board, because the men were under the World Mission Board and we were under the Woman's Missionary Society—both of those groups were quite conservative. This younger missionary, who had gone there recently, he was working with a group of the Korean Presbyterian Church (ours)—that wanted the missionaries and the United Church to back off and allow them to become more independent. And there was a big fight over that just when I arrived.

KA: Really?

DR: Yeah. And it was very unpleasant: I have a couple of letters in what I'm putting in the archives that relate to my attempt to at least understand what was going on. Anyway, it turned out that the younger missionary was called back home and the older group remained. However, over the years that did take place; the Korean Church is independent of the United Church, and we're just associated. In a sense, helpers.

KA: But that would have been years.

DR: Yeah, that would be years later. But it was … how shall I say it? It was a vast learning experience for me. But at the end, the Woman's Missionary Society would have liked to see me stay, at least they asked me, in two or three different letters, if I would come back to Canada and train further and then go back. And I didn't want to do that, because one of the things that I found was that despite the interest of teaching English, I was not being intellectually stimulated, and it was getting harder and harder for me just to keep up with going through a process where my mind wasn't being used very much. So I said no, that I was going to come back, and at that point I was in contact with the SCM and had gotten a job ...

KA: The Student Christian Movement?

DR: Yeah, the Student Christian Movement. And I had gotten a job as an associate secretary at McGill. So I came back to McGill.

KA: And that was in '59? 23:41

DR: Yup, '59. And then … was that the first year? No … I can't remember, but I think it was after a year, I decided that I needed to learn more theology, because that's basically the background out of which I was working, and yet I didn't know enough. So I registered for a course in the Faculty of Religious Studies, but, surprisingly, I registered in a course on Old Testament, not in theology.

KA: Was that by accident?

DR: I don't know.

KA: Or you said, "Oh that looks interesting."

DR: Yeah, that's what I said. That way I met—the teacher was Stanley Frost, and he was very dramatic and very interesting. And so the next year, I thought, "Well, I'll do two courses." Because I had the time, being with the SCM. So I took, I think, the course in New Testament, and then in Hebrew Language.

(Laughter)

KA: And that was the beginning of … that's it.

DR: Yeah, that was the beginning of finishing a BD with Honours in Old Testament, and then applying for entry in the PHD program in the University of Toronto. I would have loved to go to an American university—in fact, I applied and was accepted by Harvard—but I had no money to do that. I did get an Ontario Government Scholarship, so I had some money to go to the University of Toronto. And then I used my United Church contacts and my first year at Toronto I lived in what was called Covenant College—what's it called now? I'm not even sure it's there anymore.

KA: Well, it was the Centre for Christian Studies, but then they moved to Winnipeg.

DR: It was in Toronto. That's where I lived for the first year, and I was there over summer, and they asked me to—if I would, I think for a month or two, I can't remember—if I would act as the person looking after the student interests. So I was on the staff, which was very nice, because money was always a question. So at the end of that summer, I got a job at the Victoria College being a Don in the women's residence. So, one of the things—I recently told the young man who was going to study in the archives school at the University of Toronto—that one of the ways I supported myself through graduate school was always to have a position in a residence, because you get free room and board: cuts out a *huge* amount of expenses! I was a Don at Victoria College, and then the last year I was there, I was the Senior Don, and I even had an apartment with a living room and a bedroom! Anyway, it was great because I was on the campus so I had no traveling expenses to get back and forth, and it gave me a lot more time. And the residence was right across the street from the big museum …

KA: It's not the ROM?

DR: Yeah, the ROM.

KA: It is? Yeah.

DR: And of course there was no PhD program in Old Testament at that time. I was registered in a program called Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Most of the professors had done Old Testament, but they had also done more than that in

terms of understanding the ancient Near East. So, my studies were much broader than one would have if you just had done a PhD in Old Testament. The second year I was there, I was just finishing my required coursework, and I saw this advertisement for a graduate program, a year study abroad, supported by the government of Israel—a scholarship for a year's study in Israel. So I applied. And so I went off to Israel in 1966. 29:26

KA: Whoa. (Laughs)

DR: Gaily going.

(Laughter)

KA: Lively. Setting off.

DR: Setting off! And I was there, and of course I was still in my year in Israel when, of course, the whole conflict started between Israel and the Arab States. As I was there, one of the national staff of the SCM wanted me to be related to a project going on in the World Christian Student Federation—the WCSF—and it was a Middle Eastern study—there was an SCM in Lebanon, among the Arabs, but there was nothing in Israel. So there were four of us—two American fellows, [Merrill Miller and Jack Hawley,] who had just graduated from Union in New York, and a Dutch girl, [Trudy vanAsperen, but I can't remember] where she'd graduated from, although she became a very close friend … and me. And we were all—three of us were students. Actually, one of the Americans started off as a student at the Hebrew University, but he'd already graduated and he got bored. So he went off and got a job teaching in an Arab school—an Arab high school.

Anyway, the four of us were there when this whole thing started, and Jack—[he's the one that had left the university and was teaching high school]—he was a very strapping young man, and we'd had a group discussion—were we leaving the country or were we staying? And if we stayed, we had to do something helpful. But we didn't want to necessarily line up with one side or the other. So we were talking about, maybe one of the things to do is: the men are being called up from the kibbutzim, and maybe we can just go and work in the orchards and work in the fields and so on. This would produce food, anyway. Well, Jack decided, on his own, to go off to a kibbutz, but he came back the same day—he went in the morning, he came back the same night—and said that he had gone to volunteer to do that kind of labour, but they had put him on learning how to shoot a bazooka. For the whole day. And he said, "I'm an American. I'm not allowed to do that. So I've gotta leave." So he left, and the three of us stayed. The other guy, the other American, he was small and not very strong and, you know, he obviously wasn't going …

KA: Gonna be the bazooka guy.

DR: Yeah, wasn't going to be the bazooka guy.

(Laughter)

DR: So he stayed and at first you'd go to class and a couple of the students would not be there. And then you'd go the next day and a few more weren't there—because they were all getting called up. And the next day you'd go, the professor wasn't there 'cause he got called up. So there we were—what are we doing? So we all—the three of us—went to a kibbutz, farther away from Jerusalem, in towards the south. And we worked there a couple of days. We were in the fields. Trudy and I, we were assigned to thin pears.

KA: She's the Dutch friend.

DR: The Dutch friend, yeah. We were in the field—you started at daybreak …

KA: Because of the heat.

DR: The heat, yeah. And then the day ended at noon. But, we had been in the orchard a very short time and suddenly there are these planes, very low over us, headed to Egypt. And that was the first action the Israelis took, and they bombed all the Egyptian air force—planes—on the runways. It was a strategic move. And then about two hours later, we were all talking: "What is going on? What is going on?" And then about two hours later, there was a lady that had brought her radio into the field, and we started hearing this siren. And it was coming over the radio, and it was obviously a warning siren in Jerusalem. And so we knew that something was really happening. So when we broke—you have a breakfast in mid-morning: you start work without … maybe you have a cup of coffee but you don't get a meal and breakfast was about 8:30—and so at that point there were meetings about, you know, plans for what we were doing. At that point, Merrill, the other American, said, "I'm going back to Jerusalem." [And so Merrill was so insistent] because he had a girlfriend there.

KA: Oh!

(Laughter)

KA: Priorities.

DR: Yeah, priorities. And Trudy said, "My parents said, 'cause they went through the Second World War, never split up. Always keep together, because you could get split up and never find each other." And so Merrill was so insistent that—I can't remember if it was the same day … no, it must have been the next day—that we got up and went out to wait for the bus to take us to Jerusalem. (Laughs) Can you believe this?

KA: No, I can't. (Laughs)

DR: This is the funniest story, because I kept saying, "You think there's going to be a bus?" and then, right on time, the bus arrived … (Laughter) … and we were

driving along, we were kind of more towards the Mediterranean, and we were diving along and this man was standing beside the road trying to hitchhike. The bus comes along, but he doesn't indicate to the driver that he wants to get on the bus. So the bus drives on, maybe another kilometer, and then he backs up. And he stops beside this guy and he gets him onto the bus, and we drive off to the police station. Because the driver says, "In these kinds of situations, you take whatever transportation's available and you don't … and this must be a spy!" (Laughs)

KA: Right, because it's suspicious. Why wouldn't you get on the bus?

DR: Exactly! (Laughs)

KA: Why wouldn't you flag down the bus?

DR: Yes, exactly! And a spy would have been smart enough to get on the bus!

(Laughter)

DR: Anyway.

KA: Maybe he was just standing there, stunned to see a bus drive by.

DR: Yes, exactly.

(Laughter)

DR: Anyway, we … I'm not sure all of this is going to do much for your archives. (Laughs). Anyway, we go off. There's this American woman on the bus, because she lived in kibbutz, but she wasn't leaving, she was just going on some kind of business to Tel Aviv. After that, we get to Tel Aviv and we look around, and there in the bus depot, there's a bus up there. And it says 'Jerusalem'. And I don't know … you probably wouldn't be familiar with this, but pre-'67, Israel was a long territory, and then it had this very narrow piece of land that went up to Jerusalem. It was narrow. But, here was this bus going to Jerusalem, and everybody sitting on the bus was sitting on the side away from—when you got on that road, going up that long stretch, you would be farther away from any shells or anything.

KA: By an aisle.

DR: Yes, by an aisle. By two seats and an aisle.

KA: That's great.

(Laughter)

DR: So anyway, we got on the bus.

KA: So there were lots of seats on that side.

DR: Yeah, there were lots of seats! We got on that bus and we went off to Jerusalem. And we got there, and they dumped us off at the bus depot, which is well in the west of the city, and we were standing there, and there wasn't anything. There's no traffic, there's no way we could get back to where we lived. So we're standing there thinking, "What are we going to do?" And these two guys come along in a big car—they're obviously North African Jews, because they're big and jolly, just like the Arabs, I almost thought they were—anyway, they stop and there are three of us and we've each got a bag, but they stop and we get in the car—we have to get in the car because that's their job: they were supposed to take any civilians into where there's a bomb shelter. So, we are going to where we live, except they decide they really want to know what's going on, and so we drive down—before the '67 war, there was a wall dividing East and West Jerusalem. So we go and we drive right down the wall. And the damage—you know, there were broken windows … and we're driving and this little boy comes out selling newspapers.

KA: You're kidding.

DR: (Laughs)

KA: Hey, you wanna know what's going on?

DR: Yeah!

(Laughter)

KA: Wow. Sounds surreal.

DR: Anyway, they get us back to—Trudy and I had rented an apartment. Merrill was living on the university campus, so he came back with us because there wouldn't be anything there, no food, no nothing. So we go into the bomb shelter and the—well, basically it's women and children who are there, all the men are away, and they looked at us, and they couldn't believe it. They said, "You mean Tel Aviv hasn't been destroyed?" Because all [the news that] they were getting was coming from the Arab [stations]. And they had no Israeli news at all—they weren't releasing anything. So we sat in the bomb shelter for, I think, two or three more days, and then it was over.

KA: Yeah it was so quick, eh?

DR: It was amazing.

KA: You arrived as if you must have been from another planet. "No, no we came on the bus from Tel Aviv …"

DR: (Laughs). When we came up the road, we started up the main road and then the driver took us to the back road, which was the other side of the strip, and as we went up—that was a gravel road—and as we went up there, all of these Israeli troops were sitting there in the trees! They weren't moving; they weren't doing anything. It was a most amazing experience, it really was.

Then we were in Jerusalem, and it ended.

KA: So, after the end of that particular short conflict, you stayed for the rest of your year.

DR: Yeah. Before the war, between … before the war, not very long before it, we had, as Christians, been able to get a permit, or a Visa, to cross the dividing line and spend Easter in East Jerusalem and the Jordanian area. So we had crossed there and the four of us … we had an Anglican priest, who crossed back and forth all the time, and he had got reservations in a hostel, for rooms, and so we were staying in this hostel. It was pretty crowded and it was very rainy and wet. You'd get in at night and there must have been about thirty people sleeping in the one room, and all of their wet clothes—we had these little heaters and they would sort of drape their wet clothes around the heater, and believe me, every time you walked in the smell was just absolutely incredible. Anyway, when we were in Jerusalem, a number of the Arab students that I had gotten to know at the University, they had given me some lists of books they would like to have that they couldn't buy on the Israeli side. So, we started—I had a book finding [mission] ...

KA: You were a bootlegger for books to cross.

DR: Yes! (Chuckles). And particularly, some of them were in Arabic, so I don't think the Israelis wanted them in Israel. But anyway, I went looking for books and in the course of all of this we got to meet an Arab family—it wasn't a book store that they had, but this Arab family—the people that worked in the markets, I don't know if you would be familiar with this, but in Middle Eastern markets, they're very hospitable. They'll invite you in and serve you a cup of hot coffee and, of course it's Arab coffee so it really keeps you awake. (Laughs). We could sit down and warm ourselves by their brazier and—anyway, we got to know this one [Arab] family and so after the war, I think it was about a week later, the Israelis let us cross into East Jerusalem. So the first thing we did was to go back to this shop to see what had happened to the family. Part of the family had left, but then part of it had stayed. This family became very close friends of ours in the time that we were there. And it was very enlightening to have friends on the Israeli side and friends on the Arab side.

KA: Yeah. Did you speak Arabic by this point? Or is that what you were learning at university there?

DR: I was taking a course in Arabic and it was the next year, because although I had a scholarship for only one year, the WSCF wanted us to continue after the war. So they found money for us for another year and the money, of course, it

didn't come from the WSCF, it came from the World Council, and the World Council's portion for me came from the United Church. So I was back working for the United Church.

(Laughter)

DR: So there I was. The Passover break the next year, I went for three weeks to an Arab village. This had been arranged by an Arab Catholic priest, because they had a mission there. He had been the priest in this village, but he had left because they were short of priests and he was in Jerusalem, and there was no priest living there. Somebody came in on Sundays and then two nuns from Nazareth went there on the weekends—Saturday and Sunday—to teach the women. And so he arranged for me to live in that house for three weeks [to practise Arabic]. I went to Nazareth, met the sisters, went up to the village with them, and then they introduced me to people that were congregants. So I stayed there, in that house, and it was absolutely incredible. Because, first of all, it was far better for me to be on my own there [as the men worked out of the village] and they all spoke Hebrew. [So I could only associate with the women, and they didn't speak Hebrew, only Arabic.] So that was great for my Arabic.

KA: So that's where you had your immersion in Arabic.

DR: I had my immersion in Arabic. And I basically socialized with the women. And the men would be around because—he had arranged this and it just blew my mind—I got an invitation to a home for lunch and another home for dinner every day I was there.

KA: Every day.

DR: *Every day.* And the one that I ate with for dinner, they would give me food for breakfast the next morning. I couldn't believe it.

KA: Kind of radical hospitality, eh?

DR: Yeah, really. And I had great fun. The women laughed, they thought I was really … but I think I must have been an extremely strange phenomenon to them. (Laughs).

KA: Well, it kind of sounds as if you're … you know … the way you walk in the world is a bit radical and ground-breaking, so I would imagine they kind of thought you were a bit strange.

DR: (Laughs)

KA: There's this woman who shows up in their village.

DR: Yes. That's right. Yes. And actually, this one really surprised me: I was already in my, well, in my early thirties, and the priest who had arranged this at

Eastertime, he came back to that location for Easter services. And actually, the two nuns were there and I was there and he was in the same house, so I guess it was all very satisfactory to them. But anyway, during that time he said to me, "A family has asked me if you would marry their son."

KA: Oh!

DR: (Laughs)

KA: A marriage proposal!

DR: I …

KA: And he's the one to arrange it!

DR: (Laughs). And so I had to say, "Well that's kind of flattering, but there's no way." But anyway, I thought that was … I'm sure he knew that that wasn't going to fly, because he had, what would I say … he had figured out who I am … what I was, better than that.

KA: You must have been an anomaly, eh. An independent woman. You know, a teacher and someone a scholar, showing up their village to … curiosity, trying to learn about their lives and learn Arabic, you know?

DR: Yeah. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

KA: That's amazing, and it would have been, like, '68? '68?

DR: This would have been '68, yeah.

KA: Wow.

DR: Yeah. And then my connection with the WSCF and the World Council ended that summer. We had—the four us—had an assignment that we were to work on for that year after the war, that we were to work on the whole question of … well, I guess you'd call it reconciliation, but the relationships between the Israeli and Arab students. So we had used our contacts—like I knew the Arab students at the University, I had got to know some of them—I knew Israeli students, too, but among the four of us we were able to line up a meeting that we had, actually, in the Anglican priest's home, because he had a bigger area for—a bigger room for us to meet in. And we had invited students to come to it, and it was a meeting—Trudy actually chaired it—and it was a meeting between Arab and Israeli students. One of the Arab students was actually from a family where he hadn't studied at the Hebrew University; he had studied abroad. We invited them, this group, to come to our apartment about three days before we were going to have the formal meeting where it was open to everybody. Anyway, we had expected that this meeting might go on for an hour … it went on so long that there were no buses available. The buses had stopped before

they were willing to leave! (Laughter). So I don't know what they did—how they got back—but we decided that we weren't taking care of that part of things. Well, then on the night we had the meeting, each side arrived with these … people (older people)—that neither of us could figure out we had … we had students there.

KA: Did they bring elders, do you think?

DR: On the Israeli side they had the Shin Bet.

KA: Oh yeah.

DR: Which is in—(laughs) —which is security, and I'm sure the same was on the other side. Or at least there were elders who were watching what was going on.

KA: Okay.

DR: Anyway, it was something.

KA: Sounds a little tense and heated.

DR: Yeah, and it was. It was. I'm sure from—I know, from that time on—for example, when I went to this village for these three weeks, I was told by one of younger men that there was a person who sat outside my house—my house had a wall around it, and I locked my gate at night. And he sat outside that wall all night. And he said, "He's from the Shin Bet."

KA: Hm.

DR: So from then on, I think I was under—I think all four of us were under surveillance.

KA: Yeah. Protection or surveillance.

DR: Yeah. Just to find out what we were doing, I'm sure. I mean, it just washed off me. I didn't give it any real, serious thought. It was just a fact of life.

(Chuckling)

KA: I'm getting a bit of a sense of your blithe spirit. "Oh, I'm gonna go off to Korea … I'm just gonna go off to this Arab village."

(Laughter)

KA: The intrepid block … oh, there's a security guard.

(Laughter)

DR: Anyway, I would say that that was the last period that I had a formal connection to the United Church. Because when I went to the Faculty of Religious Studies, I was a member of United Theological College and I … you know, I attended their meetings and so on, but I didn't have … what would I call it?—a formalized relationship. So, in a way, it's really those two periods that I had the closest connection to the United Church. Then I … I mean, I've always been a member of the United Church, but in terms of working for the church, I guess what I did … I was a member of whatever that committee was called, that was Faith and Theology or something, I can't remember. I was on that committee for awhile. So, I've served on national committees. 58:50

KA: And you were … I think I saw on your CV that you were working on inclusive language as well.

DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

KA: Yeah? Working on papers on inclusive language and theology.

DR: Yeah, I gave papers to some church meetings, too. But, you know, I wasn't an employee of the United Church; I was an active member.

KA: Well, I think … I mean, I hear your story, too—you were staying at Covenant House, which is the place where the diaconal ministers were formed, the Centre for Christian studies, and your teaching overseas, and then as the first woman Dean of Religious Studies at McGill—there's a huge amount of what I hear as service to the community at large and to the church—teaching Old Testament … what I hear is all your life has been in service. So whether or not you were employed by the United Church, it sounds like you were more maybe … do you see yourself more that you've been in the stream of the diaconal kind of ethos of education service?

DR: Yeah.

KA: I'm not trying to fit you into a box.

DR: No, no.

KA: That's just kind of what comes to mind … your teaching …

DR: Yeah, and I think the thing is that most of that you would classify with the lay people that have been so significant in the United Church, and there are all kinds of them that have—and both men and women—but some of the women have been absolutely spectacular in what they have done. They … I just think of some of the women here in British Columbia that have been so active. So it would be more—my connection would be more like that. 1:01:32

KA: And pretty typical for women. That … there weren't specific positions, or it's not as well defined in roles and how … in education or as women who are married

to ministers, like your mum, that her service and her work is just less defined.

DR: Right.

KA: And less counted.

DR: Yeah. I think … and, unfortunately, there aren't documents that document all that, and it's been extremely important for … I mean, what would the church be without all those lay people? That's what it is, really. But anyway, I can't think of … maybe you have some more questions.

KA: I do. I have a million questions. I guess I was thinking kind of in the stream of what we were just talking about, where do you see in your life … was it your parents who fostered that sense of service? And the greater social justice in your life? 1:03:26

DR: Oh yeah, I think so. I think so. I think because … what could I say? … the influence of my parents was very strong. It had to be known in all of us. Because the … I was born during the Depression and that formed a lot of the ways in which our family acted through the … through my younger years. But the thing was, you had to be responsible for yourself or for your actions. My parents didn't let us get away with anything. (Laughs). And, you know how little kids are always helping themselves to things that they're not supposed to do, especially in stores? Well, if you took something from a store, my dad would be there and you would go back to that store and you would return it to the owner. You had to act … you had to behave. So yes, that was a very strong influence on our behaviour.

KA: The values that you learn from it.

DR: Yeah, the values. And the other thing is that for my parents, education was really important. We all had to have music lessons. Interestingly enough, my older sister, my brother, and I didn't succeed very well, so they'd given up by the time my younger sister came along. And she begged them for at least two years for piano lessons before they finally gave them to her, and she's the only professional musician in the family. Those things were really important, education-wise. They were always there if there were things you didn't understand in school; they were always there to help you. Because my dad, obviously, was extremely well-educated. He had studied biology at U of T—had a degree in biology—at the time that Banting and Best were on the faculty.

KA: Oh, my goodness.

DR: Yeah. And then my mother: she didn't go to university, but she went to normal school and so she was a professional teacher before she married, and then she went back to it after, when we were all away from home. And they didn't really want to recognize her certificate—I mean, they had to recognize her certificate, but the only job available—and it was so interesting—for my mother

… she was put in a school for handicapped kids and she took courses at UBC and in the States to work with these handicapped children. And she loved it. My sister, also. My older sister also taught handicapped children. And she despaired with this integration into the classroom, because she said the kids did much better when they were not integrated, because they got specialized teaching. But anyway ...

KA: Maybe that's why your mother wanted you out of the house there.

DR: (Laughs)

KA: You can't stay here anymore!

DR: I wanna go back to work!

KA: I wanna go back to work!

DR: I was old enough to be going!

(Laughter)

DR: Maybe that's true.

KA: But it is pretty unusual that they would have been—not that they had values of education as paramount, but in that time that you would have been going to university. Did that seem a given, given who your parents were and your growing up?

DR: Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact, my older sister—she said this was the only thing she resented in my father—she went to university, it would have been in the '40s, and she ended up at UBC as the veterans were coming back, and she hated it. Now, I'm not sure what the issue was, but she hated it. She dropped out and my dad was really upset by that, because she was number one and she was supposed to set the example for the rest of us. But she went on and she went to normal school and became a primary school teacher. And then my brother … my brother got expelled from grade twelve. Which he had … because he had had … he could be very stubborn and he had had a dispute with the principal, and the principal went and got the board to expel him and there was another teacher who thought that was totally unjust, and it was—what? —three months before graduation. So this teacher took it upon himself to make sure my brother knew everything and was facilitated to take the final exam. And he passed. So he went off to Queen's, which was very expensive for my parents, and we wondered what—I wondered, because I think my younger sister wasn't so concerned—I was *dying* to go to university. And my parents—we were living in Armstrong, BC—and we'd been there, I don't know, five years or so, and my dad decided that the only way that we could go to university was if he could find a call in the Vancouver area. So he must have put his name in, and what happened was—this is why we were in Richmond— 1:08:42

they had, in Steveston—two congregations: one English and one Japanese. And, I guess it was the Conference, was very … they really wanted to integrate the congregations because they were really working with the generation of—the younger generation of Japanese had been born and raised here, so language wasn't a problem, but they had an older group that still primarily spoke Japanese. The plan was that my dad was to see about the integration of these two congregations at Steveston, and at the same time there was a returned missionary from Japan who worked part time with the older—with the Japanese speaking group. But my dad went to every one of their meetings.

KA: Was that Grace Namba?

DR: I … might … I can't remember the name, but it might …

KA: Deaconess?

DR: Yeah, she was a deaconess, whoever it was. She continued in that congregation as long as they were living.

KA: It's quite something, because that would have been after the war, so that would have also been trying to integrate the Japanese returning from being interned.

DR: That's right. That's right, exactly.

KA: Huge kind of cultural cauldron there.

DR: Oh yeah. Yeah. We went—my parents moved there in '52. I didn't go until '53 because I stayed with my older sister—she was married and had kids by this time—I stayed with her for a year because I had a good job and I—you know, money was so tight that I decided to work for a full year and then begin university. So in a sense, my younger sister and I began UBC at the same time.

KA: Oh, okay. And were you working in Armstrong? You stayed in Armstrong?

DR: Yeah, I stayed in Armstrong.

KA: What were you working as?

DR: I was just a clerk in a grocery store. It wasn't a bad wage.

KA: It was a job.

DR: It was a job. And I could save because I was living with my sister. And I did an

awful lot of babysitting for her and my brother-in-law so they could go out socially. (Laughs). Anyway, it was a—yeah, and then because Dad moved down—he had two congregations—Steveston and then South …?

KA: South Arm?

DR + KA: South Arm.

KA: South Arm, yeah.

DR: And then by the time he was leaving—that was five years later—South Arm was talking about building a new church, because it had been a little rural church. That's what it was when we were there. And then it became the South Arm that it is now, which is … big.

KA: Big.

DR: Big, yeah.

KA: And did it happen that the Japanese congregation and Steveston and South Arm—they joined?

DR: Not South Arm. They're separate. And Steveston … what was the name of the Korean moderator? Do you remember? There was one moderator that was Korean.

KA: I was gonna say Ban Ki-moon, but he's the head of the UN.

DR: No—yeah, he's the head of the UN!

(Laughter)

DR: Anyway, he … he came to Steveston as my dad's successor.

KA: Oh, really?

DR: Yeah. I know my dad knew him before he came. The other thing that was so interesting in terms of the integration was my dad—I still remember this—saying, at one point, that for the very first time, he had a marriage, which was between Japanese and White. The very first time. So the integration was proceeding … and the girl that we went to university with, she was a pharmacist, and she married a Japanese guy who was also a pharmacy 1:15:35

student, and he had been interned way in the north of BC—he was a bit older than she was, they've remained life-long friends—but the thing that was interesting is that Joyce and Fred, her husband, and I were invited to their fiftieth wedding anniversary and I would say that that half of the family—the extended family—is white. They are so integrated, it's just amazing. And you think back, that that's … that's post-war.

KA: Yeah, and—I was just gonna ask—that's incredible, because coming back, the Japanese who did come back, who actually did come back to the same place—some of their possession would have been gone, their houses, their fishing boats—everything.

DR: Yeah, yeah. And you know, it's interesting because—this is a story—the Steveston manse was on a half-acre of land. And then the next properties tended to be that size. And two doors down the street, there was a couple that were members of the church, and—the next-door couple were Europeans, but the next ones along were members of the congregation—and that man had had a very good relationship with one Japanese family, and when they left, he bought their fishing boat, and he returned it to them.

KA: Really. When they came back.

DR: Yeah. Because the government sold them off for *nothing*. So it wasn't a big deal for him to buy it—but he preserved it for his friend.

KA: Wow.

DR: And I don't know to what degree that kind of thing happened, that they were able to return with some possessions. They may have bought their houses, they may have … I don't know. Because they were sold off for nothing.

KA: And I had read, too, that … I don't know what the First Nations community was in Steveston, and the fishing there because it was mostly Japanese and they were allowed to have boats, and then when the … when we interned the Japanese and dispossessed them of all their belongings, that that was when the First Nations people actually got access to getting fishing boats. So I was always curious—I'm curious what that was like, when also that cultural integration, or not, in what happened.

DR: And I don't remember any First Nations people being members of that congregation. I tended not to go to the service in Steveston because that was the early one. My dad would go to Steveston first, and then South Arm. So I usually joined up with my parents to go to South Arm, which was a bit later in the morning.

(Chuckling)

DR: So I got to know the people in South Arm then—I didn't know the people in Steveston at all. Joyce really did, because she really … 1:19:50

KA: That's your sister?

DR: My sister, yeah. She and her husband were … I don't know if they were engaged when they graduated. It was clear that Fred was gonna marry her. Anyway, she stayed with them and I went off to Korea, so, you know, I have travelled so much that in my earlier years I was never at a wedding of any of my siblings. Any of my family.

KA: Wow.

DR: Yup. Yeah. My older sister—it would have been possible, but they actually eloped, so nobody was there. (Laughs)

KA: It sounds like she was the rebel: she was the one who left university, eloped …

DR: Yeah, yeah. She was. She was.

KA: Yeah.

DR: My brother married in Ontario—my parents were there but nobody else from the family. Joyce got married the year after—the end of the first year I was in Korea.

KA: That must have been something. I mean, I can't imagine it now, with the—the world we live in, with planes … but for your parents and for your family to send you off to Korea for three years ostensibly, in a place that was just—just had a war. For me, the only way I can imagine it is to think of all our people who came from the old world—who aren't First Nations—sending their people off on the boat but never knowing they're going to see them again. I know it wasn't quite the same, because you had reports of people coming back, missionaries coming back, but there is that sense of … Did you have the sense that you were heading off with everything you might need in your entire life—your furniture, your fifteen bags …?

DR: (Laughter) I don't know. I thought I was just, you know, taking off on an adventure.

(Laughter)

DR: And then it got pretty serious, because we went on this freighter—I got on this freighter, you wouldn't believe things—but I had never heard of the place, it was a place called Anacortes. 1:22:19

KA: Oh, yeah.

DR: It's just on the peninsula of the United States. They were loading lumber there. And they had this whole deck with lumber chained on it. So we take off from the North Pacific, we went very far north, because we were in sight of one of the Aleutian Islands, and the reason for that was because of the storms that were in the center of the Pacific. But we hit the side of one of the storms and we had a day when the captain said we didn't move. We were going full steam ahead, and we didn't move. And I was seasick like you wouldn't believe.

KA: Just that one day for the storm?

DR: No.

KA: Or for the whole time?

DR: Once it had started, it was not until we met calmer weather that I got over it. I was seasick for four or five days, and then we were coming out of it, and the captain—there was a mess boy that came and brought us food and stuff, like Ramona … We were only four women passengers on this freighter and they had room for twelve in six double rooms. So we each got a separate room. And this cabin boy would come in and clean and look after us. One day, the captain came in, and he had this glass, which looked like tomato juice and he said, "I'm not leaving 'till you drink this." And it was tomato juice and vodka.

KA: Oh!

(Laughter)

DR: I didn't taste the vodka, but he said, "This will settle your stomach." And it did. Even though I might have been slightly drunk, it really did and I began to be up and around. And the weather was, you know, much better and … that storm, I was so sick, I kind of lay in bed and thought, "I don't care if I die."

(Laughter)

KA: How long was the crossing?

DR: Oh, it was a long crossing, because I think going across Pacific was ten days. Then we came into Yokohama and we were there two or three days—we were allowed.

KA: You were allowed to get off?

DR: Oh, yeah, we could get off. We were getting off into US controlled ports and then we could get permission to … we went into Tokyo. Maybe it was two days that we went into Tokyo and we met some of the United Church people there at that time. And then we went from Yokohama to Kobe, which is down in the south.

KA: Is that one of the [hot] springs places? Kobe?

DR: I'm not … spring … it's close to Osaka, and we went into Osaka. Yeah, we could get off. If it was anchored, we could get off in the daytime and tour around. In Kobe we actually sat two extra days because it was hit by a typhoon. We were on the ship, anchored in the bay, and it hardly moved. After going through this big storm, you're hardly moving, and you think, "Well, a typhoon can't be that serious." (Laughs). Later on I experienced a typhoon—one of the crazy things I did, talking about adventures, when I was in Korea, I decided I had been to an industrial work camp in the SCM, so I worked in a factory.

KA: In Toronto?

DR: In Toronto. And we talked about that kind of work and so on, and I thought, "Well, I'd like to find out about that kind of thing in Korea." So, actually, it was a Methodist minister who—when I talked to him about this—who arranged for me to work for a month in a Korean factory. 1:27:35

KA: In 1956-ish

(Laughter)

DR: Yeah, it was—I think it was the summer of '57. I had—when I got to Korea, the one thing I was really angry with the [WMS] for was that they wouldn't give me any language classes. So I decided [to hire a teacher myself]. I was very careful about how to do this, so I consulted [Korean colleagues] about this [and hired one of the English students whose family was poor]. I hired her and she came to my room at eight o'clock every morning of the week, except the weekend, and we studied Korean for an hour. I wanted to be able to get around—talk to people! I mean, I couldn't carry on a conversation, but I had to get—I mean, "How do you get there?"—that kind of thing. Anyway, I took this girl with me to the factory; I'm sure she must have been insulted, but she was getting paid for it. (Chuckling) Anyway, that was …

KA: Did you still stay living wherever you were?

DR: No, I was living in Seoul and this factory was in Pusan, and Pusan is on the south coast. That was the big port. And the typhoon—we were living in the house of—it was the missionary house for a couple that were living there, but

they had gone off to a summer retreat kind of place that all the churches owned on the coast, anyway. They were having their summer there. And so I lived in their house with my companion. We were hit by a typhoon—Pusan. And the first day of that typhoon—I couldn't believe it. The house was kind of Japanese-style, so the windows were loose in the frames.

KA: And construction out of … bamboo?

DR: No. No it was wood.

KA: Wood, yeah.

DR: The wind and the rain was so hard that at the bottoms of the windows—it would come under the windows and out eight inches before it dropped on the floor.

KA: Whoa! Horizontal rain.

DR: All around were shacks completely collapsed. Ours was one of the few houses still standing when the typhoon was over. It was awful. I didn't go to work then.

(Laughter)

KA: I guess not!

DR: But it was fascinating, actually, to do that. I got to talk to the women that were—I was really working with what the women did. It was a pottery factory and the agreement—the only way [the Methodist missionary] could get an agreement with the owners to do this was that I worked eight hours a day and then, for one hour at the end of the work day, I taught them English.

KA: Oh, my goodness. Wow.

DR: (Laughs)

KA: You certainly honed your teaching skills over the years. Holy moly. Wow.

DR: Yeah.

KA: What do you think the other women thought? Of this crazy woman showing up.

DR: I'm sure that they couldn't figure it out at all. Before I left, I had a group of them

that I'd gotten to know a little bit better—I had them over to where I lived, for a meal. That was fascinating. Really was. Hearing their personal stories, which they didn't tell you at work. But it was—there was one woman, she always wore long sleeves and long skirts and she had some serious scars on her face. And I learned that she was in Hiroshima when the bomb dropped. And she—her whole body was covered with scars.

KA: With radiation burns.

DR: Yeah. But she had survived. And she had been married—I don't know … I think … well, she had a son. I don't know if that was before or after. At least, she lost one husband in that. And whether she had married again and had this son, I don't know. But she had to … these women worked so hard, they were working nine hours a day, seven days a week. And she said she didn't have time to look after her son. So her son was with her parents in the country and she was working in town to keep everything going. And her son was basically growing up without really knowing her. And she was—that was typical of these people.

KA: And the Korean countryside would have been just devastated by … was it agent …

DR: No, no, no. That was the …

KA: But mining and bombs.

DR: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah.

KA: So the destruction—the country would have been forced … the only work to do was to go into the factories to make a living.

DR: Yeah.

KA: Wow. That's amazing. To think of …

DR: Even in the country areas, of course the plots of land that each farmer had were relatively small, so they had to have good crops to survive, too. And if they ever got crop failure, they'd be up a creek. No, it was such a shock. At least in British Columbia, and especially in the rural areas, you didn't grow up—I didn't grow up with wealth. There was no wealth here—not even in Vancouver, really. But I think it was less shocking for me than it would have been for some of the others—even the three girls who went to Japan, who were from back east. I think they would have found Korea much—maybe even too difficult. Because when I arrived, I couldn't get over the fact that little kids were running around naked. It was hot! So … but it was convenient for the parents just to leave them that way, because they didn't have to wash and dry

or anything.

KA: They might not have had a lot to put on their kids.

DR: Exactly.

KA: So most of the women that you met in the factory, the story of these women would have been quite typical: of never seeing their children being raised …

DR: Exactly. Exactly.

DR: Being the supporter of the family.

DR: Yeah. And then the elderly parents have to look after the children, which I'm sure they were happy to do, because they liked to see the family prosper. But at the same time, they can only do that so long. It was quite something.

KA: Wow. Did you ever write up your experiences of working in the factory and being in Korea?

DR: Oh, I think I have a letter that I wrote to my parents about it. Or a report. I think that's in my files.

KA: Yeah. Wow. Hm. You must have been—there was a time where you would write home, been in correspondence with your family.

DR: Yeah, I wrote them every week. And one of the reasons that I want to put them in the United Church archives, is because … what is so surprising, when I reread all these letters—my dad kept them all, I never thought about them—I didn't write very much about what I was seeing, you know, about Korean life. I was writing about what was going on in the Missionary community.

KA: Really?

DR: (Laughs)

KA: The gossip.

DR: Well, it wasn't really gossip.

KA: No, I know, I'm just being facetious. No, the workings of what was going on in the church.

DR: Yeah, and one of them … I think you should turn the thing off for this one.

KA: All right, I'll turn it off for this one—pause it … So, we're just gonna stop at this point and put a little pin in it, so thanks for the interview so far, Donna, and I hope to be able to continue some time. Thank you.