



The United Church of Canada, British Columbia Conference

The Bob Stewart Archives

6000 Iona Drive, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1L4

Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Edith Baird

January 11, 2012

Telephone (604) 822-9589
Fax (604) 822-9212

E-mail address: united-archives@vst.edu
Web Site: <http://bc.united-church.ca/archives/>

Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Edith Baird (EB)
Date of Interview: January 11, 2012
Transcribed by: Jude McGann

Interviewed by: Sharon Copeman (SC)
Location: 6050 120 Street, Surrey, BC
Auditor of Transcription: Edith Baird

Time Log (minutes)	Description of Content
00:01	Beginning of Interview; introduction, permission, information about early life
03:25	Memories of gender inequality in the church
06:50	Role models
08:25	Meeting Bob (her husband); sense of call
10:42	Volunteer involvements
13:55	Leadership responsibilities: Conference and General Council committees
19:52	Joys and challenges; studies at VST
23:12	Ministry at Fleetwood (Surrey) and Knox (Vancouver); membership at Crossroads (Delta)
27:22	Passions: spiritual nurture; God in the absence of God; earth and nature
32:33	Influence of class, race, sexual orientation on life and church involvement
37:18	Thoughts on the direction of the church
40:38	Final comments

- SC: My name is Sharon Copeman and the date is January 11th, 2012. I'm interviewing Edith Baird as part of the "Making Room for Women" program at the United Church of Canada Archives. Edith, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?
- EB: Yes, you surely do.
- SC: Thank you so much! Edith, tell me a bit about your early life; your family, your community, and participation in the church at that time.
- EB: Thank you for coming, and for inviting me to think about some of these things. I grew up in Brandon, Manitoba. I was born in Souris, a little town outside of Brandon, and had a very warm childhood. I have one brother. My brother Morley is five years younger than me, and we just had very loving parents. My father was a mechanic in a garage. My mother did not work outside of the home while we were growing up and we were close with my Mom's sister Muriel, and her family and my cousins. And, I wasn't – we weren't – very involved in the church at all in my younger years. I went to Sunday school sometimes but not regularly. I was baptized at home, I notice from my baptismal certificate.
- SC: As a baby or . . .
- Edith: Yes, yes, as a baby and then when I was a teenager we moved out to Penticton and I finished my high school in Penticton and was more involved in the church after that time. And my mom got more involved with the church after we moved to Penticton, too. So I just feel very fortunate around my growing up; it was just warm, loving, fun . . .
- SC: And I know your Aunt Muriel. She was involved in the church, too, I guess.
- EB: Yes, yes she was and certainly very involved in Penticton. I'm not so sure that [my parents] were, just because they were busy working and so on in Manitoba but certainly she was very involved.
- SC: So your dad not so much.
- EB: My dad, never so much. He was supportive and was a member of the church. I remember when we went to Penticton he joined the church there, but wasn't really an attender at church.
- SC: Can you remember an early defining moment that made you aware of gender equality in the church? It's interesting; your dad wasn't involved. 3:25
- Edith : That's right. And some of my memories about gender inequality are kind of funny. When I was still in Brandon, when I was in grade nine, my mom and I 4:07

had been going to church, and they were having a confirmation class and I said I'd like to be part of it. And I was, and was confirmed on Easter, and said to my minister after that I thought I might like to be a minister. And he said, "Girls don't become ministers; they go to Toronto and become deaconesses."

SC: Ah, interesting!

Edith So that was one of the first experiences I had. And then when I was in high school we had a course called HPD, Health and Personal Development. And we were to look into various careers, and I looked into the career of ministry. I got written on the top of it, "Fine, but please do another on a female occupation."

SC: Ah! Wow!

Edith It was interesting for me. At that time I thought, "Why do I keep making this mistake, why don't I get it?" So I thought first of all, maybe I'd like to be an airline stewardess. And then I went to Naramata after high school and I remember two dear ladies, they'd been missionaries, but they said, "Oh no, we don't think that's what you would want to be." But I became a primary school teacher; I went into school teaching after that. And I was a teacher for, I think, around ten years and that was good. It was all good. 5:34

SC: And certainly suitable to women, at the time.

EB: Well, that's right; nobody was telling me I couldn't do it! And so I think that those were some of my first experiences of gender inequality.

SC: Inequality, yes. So you've talked a bit about your education and what contributed to your vocational choices. And your role models . . . you haven't talked about that. Is there anything more . . .

EB: The only thing to say in addition to that is that then I married a minister (Bob was a minister), and some of the people that I looked up to were Lois Wilson – now she was married to a minister and . . . 7:00

SC: . . . and not yet minister at that point . . .

EB: Yes, and then somebody else that was at theological school was Pat Baker, just before I went, and she was another woman married to a minister, and going into ministry, and so it began to feel for me like that spark that had been in me was kind of ignited again as I saw some of these women . . .

SC: . . . Eleanor O'Neil was in your time, too, wasn't she?

EB: Yes, yes she was. Now I didn't know Eleanor before I went to VST, but she was another woman in ministry.

SC: And again, the husband being a minister. When you and Bob were dating, was he already ordained?

EB: No! I met Bob . . .

SC: Did you know that he was going to be a minister? At that point?

Edith Not originally. I'd met Bob at Naramata, when I took the winter course at Naramata in 1958. And then I was teaching in North Vancouver and Bob was at that point studying for ministry. But it was interesting that after Naramata, after our course was finished, we went on tour and Bob and I happened to be on the same tour team. We went up to Hazelton and Kispiox and that was really where Bob felt the call to ministry. And it was interesting that I was there with him at that time. We weren't dating or anything at that time, but . . . 8:25

SC: And you didn't have that same sense of the call to ministry? You'd kind of set it aside because everyone had told you it wasn't appropriate?

EB: Yes, it just wasn't something in my head quite at that time. Yes, so then, Bob and I went our separate ways and then met a few years later, again, and he was studying for ministry at that time.

SC: So you worked outside the home, for pay, as a teacher. Anything else?

EB: Well, I did a number of different things when I was in school and going to college. I worked at the tourist bureau and various things that you do in the summertime. I was a primary school teacher full time, and then went into ministry. And before I went into ordained ministry, I was working alongside Bob, kind of as an associate minister up in the Okanagan when Bob was the minister at Oliver, Osoyoos, and Okanagan Falls. They were looking for somebody to work half time, and the board asked me if I would be interested in doing some of that. So I did that, and then did it when we moved down to North Delta and Surrey. Bob had a two-point charge and I worked half time. Again, more in the Christian education field at that time.

SC: So it was after that that you went back to VST?

EB: That's right, and then I went back to VST.

SC: This question is: What led to your decisions about volunteer involvements? We haven't moved into volunteer involvements yet, and it's interesting to me that you were asked to do these jobs, that some people are volunteering, and they recognized that you should be paid. Good for them. 10:42

- EB: Yes, I remember a woman in Osoyoos – we were working on the newsletter together – and she said to me, “It’s always a surprise to me that you aren’t in ministry,” and that was really the thing that lit that spark. And I thought, “Well, I did think about it, a couple of times at least!” When she said that to me, it just kind of touched something. And I thought if I ever moved down to the coast, I’d love to take courses. I just began to feel that I would love to take courses, not thinking really that I was going to go into . . . but that’s how it kind of came about . . . 11:39
- SC: Have you got something, as you planned and prepared, that I skipped over?
- EB: I was wondering, too, about the volunteer involvements. I was asked to be a CGIT leader in Penticton. And when you’re asked to do something, you think, “Well, I think I should do my part and I think that I’ll give it a try.” I think that’s sometimes how I got doing things. It wasn’t necessarily that I had felt that it was what I wanted to do, but somebody else saw it in me and asked me to do it. 12:24
- SC: And it would be a logical area as a teacher, a former teacher, to be doing that . . .
- Edith Yes, that’s right, so that’s how some of that came about, in volunteering. Somebody would ask if I would consider it, and if I felt that it was something that kind of sparked something in me, I would take it on.
- SC: So you did CGIT. Were there other things that you want to mention? Sunday school or . . .
- EB: Well, Sunday school and pastoral care was something that I would get asked to do – was interested in doing too – or visiting people, or listening to their stories. 13:19
- SC: You’d be good at that, you are good at that . . .
- EB: Well, it’s something that I just feel really, there’s something – I don’t know – when somebody tells you their story, shares something that’s going on, you just feel like you’re in the presence of the Holy.
- SC: Yes, and it’s a privilege . . .
- EB: It’s a privilege, exactly. That started in there somewhere, and it certainly has continued for me, that I find that. 13:47
- SC: Thank you. What leadership responsibilities have you carried in the church, in your congregation, and in other church courts? And what about ecumenical activities?

- EB: I couldn't think of anything particularly ecumenical that I have been involved in. In the church with the Sunday school and CGIT it started, I guess, and then to doing pastoral care work, and being involved in worship leadership. That was before I started to study, and then became an ordained minister.
- SC: And certainly as an ordained person you had certain responsibilities and some positions. Do you want to talk about those? 15:04
- EB: Sure. In the Conference, before I was ordained, when I was down here I got involved in the Evangelism Working Unit. I can't just remember how. It started out with that. I think Gary Paterson asked me if I would like to come on that unit and then I chaired it . . .
- SC: Wonderful chimes, from the clock, interrupting us for a minute. So maybe starting at the beginning of that sentence again, returning to Gary Paterson. 15:41
- EB: In the Conference, I chaired the Evangelism Working Unit. I think Gary Paterson, who was working for Conference at that time, asked me if I would like to come on that Unit. I found that a very interesting and challenging unit to be part of. How do we share our story and help people within the church to know the story?
- SC: . . . which they don't, necessarily . . .
- EB: No, so, that was one of the things I did, and then I was on the Internship Committee. This, too, was before I was ordained. I was part of the Internship Committee that helped place people and support people in their internships, and I think from there I knew that I really enjoyed and wanted to help people training for ministry.
- SC: Was that at the BC Conference level? 16:50
- EB: It was at the BC Conference level. Well I was on the . . .
- SC: Presbytery . . .
- EB: Presbytery first. I was on the Presbytery Education and Students Committee, and that got me onto the Conference committee and I was asked to chair that committee, and did that for a few years.
- SC: And that was the Conference Education and Students Committee.
- EB: That was the Conference Education and Students Committee. And then, when I came back from the Fraser Presbytery, they asked me to be on Education and Students, so I was on the Fraser Presbytery Education and Students for a few years. And then, after I retired, I was the Convenor for Fraser Presbytery Pensions for about five years, I guess.

- SC: And you mentioned the Internship Committee, was that national? 17:45
- EB: No, well I guess it was, but Douglas Bacon was chairing it at the time that I was on the BC Committee. I haven't been part of anything at the national level. There was a national connotation to this one of course.
- SC: That's right; you were the local representative. 18:11
- EB: Yes, and at one time for a few years I was on the Sexual Abuse Committee for BC, too.
- SC: Oh, yes.
- EB: I was involved with that for a few years. So that's where some of my involvement has been in the wider church, I think. Then there were those other things that I talked about. I went to General Council as a representative from Fraser Presbytery and helped to lead some supervision courses at VST. 18:55
- SC: Training people to be supervisors.
- EB: Training people to be supervisors, and also, I don't know if you remember those renovations events?
- SC: Yes.
- Edith I got involved with that, too.
- SC: In the leadership. Those were wonderful.
- EB: Yes, they were great. Some of us had gone to Toronto to a renovations event, then came back, and said we'd really like to do it here.
- SC: And I was one who appreciated that decision, because they were great . . . 19:29
- EB: They were great events to be part of and to feel the new life and the energy.
- SC: The energy, yes.
- EB: Yes, yes, energy, exactly.
- SC: So what were the important issues, joys, and challenges in your life? Is there a project or work that you have done that you are especially proud of? Important issues, joys, and challenges. 19:52
- EB: Now, I did write some things down. I think that there were lots of challenges

having a family and working full time.

SC: Absolutely.

Edith Just like everybody else in all kinds of occupations, but that's part of the challenge.

SC: How old were your children when you started? 20:34

EB: When I started at VST, I think they were about nine and twelve, and I remember them saying, "Well, just don't be going to college when *we're* going to college! Try to get out before!"

SC: Did you make it?

EB: I made it. So that was certainly one of the challenges. I think an issue for me during the time I was in ministry was around inclusiveness and the church going through its decisions around gay and lesbian people being open for ministry.¹ That was important to me, and in both churches that I was leading we had workshops on that. I felt very good about that . . .

SC: . . . how that went?

EB: Yes, just the whole issue of inclusiveness and being . . .

SC: . . . allowing people to be who they really were.

Edith That's right. Acknowledging the way God made them, and who they are.

SC: Exactly, yes.

EB: So that was an important issue, the changing church. It's interesting, in the churches that I have been involved with, I've been involved in three amalgamation talks.

SC: Oh, wow.

EB: When I was at Fleetwood Church, we began talks about amalgamating in the area, and did amalgamate with North Surrey United to become Northwood United, so I was involved there. And then when I was at Knox, we had talks with Dunbar Heights, and they chose not to amalgamate at that time, but we went through much the same thing. And then I retired and came out here, and thought, well I'm done with that . . . and the church that I am 23:12

¹ Edith Baird supplied her intended meaning, after reviewing this transcription: "I think an issue for me during the time I was in ministry was around inclusiveness and the church *being open to the ministry of gay and lesbian people.*"

part of is an amalgamation! We [St. John's Strawberry Hill] went through an amalgamation with Royal Heights.

SC: And now Crossroads.

EB: And so now we're Crossroads. So I think the changing church and the changing face of the church is happening.

SC: Certainly that's a challenge. Would you name it as joy as well?

Edith: Partly, I certainly would. Partly, I think that's the new face of the church, but it's difficult for people.

SC: Change is always hard.

EB: Yes, you know, as a minister coming into a congregation, or a new person in a congregation, I think it's not that hard for me to accept. But I haven't been going to that church . . . like at Knox, these people have been going for forty years. 24:02

SC: . . . and more.

EB: Yes, that's a whole different thing, you know. It's hard to become part of a new church, and yet it's the only way, to be part of a new church.

SC: Well, that's right and it's very exciting, actually, once you get there.

EB: Yes, oh yes. The hope that we have now at Crossroads, that's quite exciting.

SC: Once you get there, it's exciting.

EB: It's getting there.

SC: That's right, that's the hard part. And I think our buildings may be the biggest block, because we have such emotional feelings around the walls, you know, the ambience, the physical structure. I know I was receiving the newsletters from Knox because I was a candidate from there, and I stayed in touch. And, you know, I could see it coming. Eventually each congregation said, "Well, you're certainly welcome to join us in our building." 25:04

EB: "Our building," that's right. And it just seems to me very sad that we're putting so much money into roofs and furnaces and all the things that old buildings require, when there is real ministry needed in our communities. 25:27

SC: That's right, yes.

EB: So it goes.

SC: What have you been most passionate about in your adult years?

EB: Ah, where's my cheat sheet? One of the things is inclusiveness, going outside the box. It's become even more important to me in the last few years, since my son's death. That just really kind of opened the box, or changed things for me a lot.

SC: Do you want to say more about that? Don't feel you must.

EB: Right. It just feels to me now that I get a lot of nurture, spiritual nurture, from all kinds of faith. I find I'm reading broadly and experiencing the Holy in new dimensions. I think when you go through any number of things that just kind of stop you in your tracks, at least for me, it was kind of like finding a mystical sense. God in the absence of God, of the Holy when there's... 27:22

SC: When it's hard to believe the Holy is there . . .

EB: Yes.

SC: Is that what you mean? When you say the absence of God?

EB: That's right. When my mind kind of shut down or something, and I just would sit there for ages, just kind of in the emptiness, then feeling a new sense of a kind of peace, a kind of light, but not naming it . . . it just felt like it was a less rational kind of experience of the Holy than what I'd probably had. 28:23

SC: When you say less rational, what comes to my mind is of the heart rather than of the head?

EB: Yes, yes I think so. But even sometimes we think the heart, we think of emotion or feeling. In some sense there's even very little feeling to it. It's just there, it's just as the Buddhists say, "Breathe in and breathe out." It's just in the breath; it's just there . . .

SC: I'm sort of getting a sense that's its even more essential than we have any language for. 29:09

EB: Yes, I'm struggling for language for it in some sense. So that, I think, is a place where I'm kind of at now. I had a lot of deaths in a short time.

SC: You sure did.

EB: And I think that has contributed to having to find a new – that's been a blessing, you know – to find a new sense of my own inner person.

- SC: Yes.
- EB: I don't know how much of that . . . 30:16
- SC: Well it's all there, so . . .
- EB: Yes, so that's, yes
- SC: You're okay?
- EB: I'm okay. I don't think I'm expressing myself that well. I don't know that I could do any better.
- SC: Well, I think you've done very well, actually.
- EB: Well, there's a sense there. You've helped me kind of put a sense there.
- SC: Language is so limiting.
- EB: It is, isn't it? It is limiting. And that's part of it.
- SC: And of course, body language doesn't translate to an audio recording, but your body language has been what has led me to put in the words that I have.
- EB: . . . to be able to help with the words, well, that was great. I had written down, "passion around the earth," and "a caring for and being part of the earth," and "feeling one with the earth." I think it's a growing kind of passion for me. I've always appreciated nature and loved to be out in nature, and I think just feeling more one with nature all the time . . . 31:29
- SC: Has that led you to change how you eat or any of that? Or practices?
- EB: Umm, certainly, general practices of being concerned about recycling or those kinds of things, I'm not vegetarian. My health issues have played into what I'm eating more. But I just feel a great concern for what's happening to creation. Yes, and to the animals and the birds and all of that . . .
- SC: Is there more you want to say? We're over to the second page now . . . 32:33
What effect has your class, your race, your sexual orientation had on your life, on your participation in the church.
- EB: I wasn't too sure what to think about that. I'm sure that, intrinsically, you know, where I was brought up and how I was brought up has been part of what's led me in this path, and opened doors for me that would have been much more difficult, if it had been otherwise. 32:48

SC: Certainly in your early years your gender was a huge block.

EB: Yes.

SC: . . . in terms of thinking of ministry. But I think actually, in more recent years, being a woman has been a benefit.

EB: Well, yes, I think so, too. It is. The church is becoming so much more open all the time.

SC: What leisure time activities have enriched your life?

EB: Reading, I'm a reader. And writing and journal keeping has been very enriching for me. And I do more writing now than I was able to do before. Walking and friendships have been very nurturing for me. And family of course – having grandchildren. That's very nurturing and wonderful, as you know. I'm interested in sports and politics and music and plays, drama . . . all those things have been good. And with a little dog we go for walks and that's all good too. So those are some of the ways that leisure things have helped.

SC: What's important to you about your life now?

EB: Well, we've talked about some of that. I do find I'm less involved in the institutional church now than I was, partly because of my health. I never just know how I'm going to feel; it's not that reliable, even though I've been feeling quite well for the last while.

SC: And that's good.

EB: Right, but I've stepped back from the institutional church, and I think I feel a little less interested in one sense in the institutional church but I'm still very, very involved with the community of the church. It's very important to me and still I feel very anxious, or called to give support to ministers in my congregation or others. The work that they do, and the challenges of the church right now, I just really want to give support in any way I can. Because I think it's a big thing.

SC: And you know, first hand, how big it is.

EB: Well, that's it, yes. I can see that the financial challenges and the challenges of the variety of needs there are in a church, it's a big thing.

SC: It is a big thing. That probably leads to the next question. What direction do you hope the church will take in the future? Not an easy question. 37:18

EB: It isn't easy. I really don't know. I just hope that the church will stay open, or

even become more open, without losing its course, its centre. What we're about. I hope that it finds ways to reach out beyond its own boundaries, our own boundaries. It's just so hard to know, for me to know, what the future of the church is going to be. I think it certainly looks like it's going to be very different than the church we grew up in.

38:21

SC: It's interesting that Crossroads, the church that you worship in, has just completed a building project and in the time that you were doing the building, you were in the Firehall Theatre, not at a church setting, and there were people who came off the street . . .

EB: . . . to the Firehall.

SC: Have they continued?

EB: Yes, they have continued, and Cari says that there are new people coming every Sunday in this building too – the new church. So I do think there's a real spiritual hunger, and somehow, if we can help people to connect with the Holy . . .

SC: And I think, to recognize that the church is actually relevant to what they're looking for. I think that society tells them that that's not the case.

EB: That's right, and we can get so drawn down by the bureaucracy of the church, by the institutionalization of the church that that's what we communicate, too.

30:43

SC: . . . our tiredness or discouragement.

EB: . . . who can help with this? And if people come, will they work? Will they produce?!

SC: And really, what we need to do is just welcome them and say, "We're so glad you're here."

EB: That's right, yes.

SC: It's a dilemma.

EB: It is!

SC: Because we do need the people.

EB: Sure we do. So I don't know. I think there will probably be house churches and that kind of thing, too.

SC: The last question on the page is: Is there anything thing I've missed that you would like to tell me about?

EB: No, I don't think so. I think we've covered a lot of territory. I can't think of anything else, Sharon. The church really has been a wonderful community for me. I feel very blessed. I have had some difficult things in life and the church has been so supportive, held me up. When I was in ministry at Knox, first I had cancer, and then Bob died – really, they carried me through that last year of my ministry there. And I just have been so, so really blessed by the community of the church and they're just wonderful, fine people that I've come to know. We've just gone through Christmas and you hear from people. I had a Christmas card from somebody who was in my first congregation at Fleetwood. "Do you remember me?" And you just think, "Oh how wonderful that she remembers, and wants to contact me." Those kinds of things are so very warming, you know. Even though the church has its ups and downs, it's still very much a place of caring and where the spirit is alive, you know. 40:38

SC: Absolutely, yes, it is a place to experience the Holy.

EB: Yes, not the only place, but a place for sure.

SC: And those places are so needed.

EB: Yes, so needed. Those communities are so needed.

SC: Thank you, so much. This has been a real gift and I know it will be a gift to the Archives.

EB: Well, I don't know! I don't know how I got into some of this. It wasn't in my notes!