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Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Joan Burrows

December 12, 2016

Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Joan Burrows (JB)
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Transcribed by: Katherine Chambers

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Auditor of Transcription: Joan Burrows

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JL: Today is Monday, December 12, 2016. My name is Julie Lees, and I am interviewing Joan Burrows for BC Conference Archives of The United Church of Canada and their project entitled Making Room for Women. Joan, do I have your permission to proceed with the interview? 00:02

JB: Yes, you do, Julie.

JL: Thank you. As you know, the purpose of this program is to encourage women who have been in leadership roles in the church to share their stories, experiences and roles and, whenever possible, archival material. So I'd like to start by grounding us biographically before moving into your various leadership roles. Can you share a bit of information with me about where you were born and raised and how you ended up in Vancouver?

JB: I was born in Toronto. Actually, I was baptized by Dr. George Pigeon, who was the first moderator of the United Church of Canada, so that remained something special in terms of my church life. My family – my father, mother and I – moved to Ottawa in 1939, the day war was declared actually, the Second World War. My dad was the minister at Glebe United Church, which is now Glebe-St. James in the Glebe district in Ottawa. Growing up there was really quite a privilege because there were a lot of visiting diplomats and people from other countries and government visitors and so on coming and going, and they often tended to come to Glebe Church. Of course, it was the days when your mother put a roast in the oven during church and we would have Sunday dinner when we got home.

My family was very hospitable even though money was very short in those days, and so often Mother would invite somebody home after church. She tells the story that when I was twelve and we were moving to Toronto (because my father was going to the head office in the Board of Christian Education), I apparently said "Does that mean we're not going to have any more interesting people over for Sunday dinner?" So my mother did make a point of making sure that the interesting people who came to head office also came to dinner or tea or something when we moved. By this time, I also had 3 young siblings – Richard, Anne and Burt.

So I had a lot of contact with very interesting people of all different faiths (because my dad was on some international committees), including a very impressive Russian Orthodox Priest who brought us chocolates with vodka! We kids thought that was wonderful because my parents were teetotalers. (Laughter). So anyway, then I went to Victoria University, met and married my husband – despite the fact that I was "not going to marry a theologian" (laughter) – and Bob did post-graduate work in Scotland.

So we got married before we went to Scotland and by that time I had done my teaching degree. I taught school and he studied at St. Mary's College in St. Andrew's. So we now have, in our plethora of friends, a whole Scottish family down to the third generation. That was a wonderful year, just wonderful! We got a telegram from the Department of Home Missions saying that Bob had been

posted to the Thomas Crosby IV on the West Coast. In those days, Sunday School often had foci on the Thomas Crosby so I certainly knew what the boat was. The cable said that it was stationed in Ocean Falls, so we thought “well, that sounds interesting”, because, again, in this previous life of the church newly ordained theologs were sent into the mission field where they were needed for two years, and in those days most of them were not married and were all very young, with a few exceptions. So we went to the library in St. Andrew’s to see if we could find out where Ocean Falls was, and we couldn’t find it on a map. We went anyway, of course!

But, as I say, we were very young and enthusiastic and so we drove our new little Volkswagen, bought at the German Factory, across the country and arrived on the Thomas Crosby, which at that point was berthed in Vancouver for the yearly re-fit. That’s how we started, and we had a couple of wonderful years visiting logging camps and lighthouses and First Nations villages and getting to know many First Nations people, including one of the first ordained United Church ministers, Bill Robinson, who was in Klemtu. Then Bob was asked to fly the church plane out of Alert Bay.

I think I’m getting ahead of myself, I think you were just talking about how I came to British Columbia, but that’s how!

JL: And were you working at the time? Did you have to give up your own work to come to the Thomas Crosby? 05:32

JB: Well, I suppose, you could say ... But I envisaged myself as a city high school English teacher, so I realized that I had made some decisions, and that that wasn’t going to happen. I never did teach in Ocean Falls as I went on the boat with Bob during our first year there. It was wonderful because I began to really love the coast and all the people, and then I understood the work and I was never worried about him being out on the sea because he had a good first mate and an engineer. I think some of the other wives found the coastal work ... well, I shouldn’t speak for other people, but they certainly didn’t enjoy it as much as I did. And I think if you had older children and were not on the boat because your kids were in school, it was probably difficult and you were probably more lonely. Whereas I did meet people in Ocean Falls the second year and we also had boarded a student from one of the logging camps. That was quite an experience, having a teenager and a five-day-old baby. I learned a lot from that experience, too.

In Alert Bay I did a lot of supply teaching, and we had a second baby. I did supply teaching in the Indian Day School, which was connected to the Residential School that the Anglican Church had, and I must confess I did not feel comfortable there; it was very strict. I much preferred the high school where the principal ... who was one of my mentors had worked in the slums of Chicago in the mid-’50s ... He had very progressive ideas for that time, we’re talking the mid-’60s. So I learned a lot and broadened my whole idea of education as opposed to the very rigid rules that the Ontario College of Education applied, with which I was never comfortable. However, I think the

significant thing about the Alert Bay times has to do with the community. We had the highest rate of juvenile delinquency in BC at the time and a lot of the kids... a lot of B&E's and so on. The convicted young people were always sent down to Brennan Lake, which was a sort of "reform school". As I recall, I was sent down to a big conference on youth in Victoria. I actually spoke at the conference about the need for better facilities for our young people, and better opportunities—and eventually the Alert Bay Youth Guidance Committee was formed, composed of First Nations and non-Native people, and also a friend of mine who was Chinese and the wife of the local merchants was also on it. There were three nationalities in Alert Bay and often they did not get along together, but we did a lot of work in terms of building bridges and it was a great experience.

And then the local Kwakwaka'wakw women who were very active—and this was a period in history when the First Nations people were really treasuring their own culture and the first longhouse was built in Alert Bay, and the women were very involved in all this and in getting their own language in the schools and so on ... I remember how they and the school principal came one night, a big delegation of them, and asked if I would teach their children—if I would help them, rather, set up a pre-school for First Nations children. Now, you realize that in those days I thought that pre-school was for my middle class friends back in Ontario. We didn't know what to do with their pre-schoolers.

I didn't get the concept, so I certainly learned fast thanks to the principal of the school and these women telling me why they wanted this. They were very frank in saying that their children were going to be in "white man" schools and that they didn't have the background because their culture was much more oral. Their children didn't have a lot of skills in terms of identifying things with words and using scissors and things like that, that other kids did. So that was an exciting year and I taught with Hilda Sewid, the daughter-in-law of Chief Jimmy Sewid, who was very well-known on the coast at that time. It was a real privilege and I changed my whole idea and decided I was never going into a classroom again and standing up at the front as an authority figure. That was no longer my idea, just as our ideas of church were changing radically, too.

JL: I know from reading before this that education and youth and young adult education is important to you. I know you were also heavily involved in CGIT, so I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about that experience and maybe if there's a connection from what you learned through that to your ability to do the work you did in Alert Bay. 11:26

JB: Good question, and I think yes, you're right, there probably is. I hadn't thought of it that way before. When I was a teenager when we were back in Toronto ... well no, actually it started before that: my first year in CGIT I was in Ottawa, and I had a wonderful leader who just really inspired me, and really I think gave me the first inklings that I had some leadership ability. Then when I went to Toronto we went to a local church, which was very ordinary. I wouldn't say it was very inspirational at all in terms of the worship services on Sunday, but my parents believed strongly that you should go to the church or the parish where

you were living. And so it was CGIT that saved me, really.

I am quite convinced I would not still be in the church if it weren't for CGIT because I developed a lot of friends, and I have to say, there was a negative experience involved in it, too, in that we had quite a large group and the head leader disappointed me greatly. I thought a lot of her when I was thirteen and fourteen and then I think it was about the year I was fifteen and I was taking more and more leadership in terms of our local group and also I was on the CGIT Council for one or two years I think, in high school—the Toronto Area Council, and I went to camp and so on. This particular leader really disappointed me. We were practising for our pageant, and her daughter was involved, too, and she reamed out her daughter with language that I just, as a fifteen year old, could not believe. Right in front of everybody, on the chancel steps. I remember crying all the way home, just feeling so upset. And when I got home, Claire, who had been this wonderful leader whom I had liked when I was twelve in Ottawa, she and her new fiancé were there for tea. My mother took me to the bedroom and heard my distress and I came back and had tea with them.

A few days later I got a very beautiful letter from my father, who on that night had had to go to Chicago on church business. I still cherish and keep it, as he talked a lot in it about qualities of leadership and also one's ability to rise above situations, and the final tenor of the letter was that no matter what happens, that we are loved and God is with us. I think he was quite proud of the fact that I could rise to the occasion, as as one says, and not give any indication to our guests that that's how I was feeling. So that was a very powerful lesson brought out of a negative experience, and I've always carried that in the back of my mind: the importance of being leaders and setting examples and also that you can rise above difficult encounters. Because I have to say that many times in my life in the church I have been very disappointed and let down by people, mainly. But, as my dad said, people let you down but God doesn't.

JL: Right. Well, that's a good message. You also mentioned that when you were in CGIT that's when you started understanding a bit of your leadership abilities. I wonder if you might expand on that a little bit more, maybe on what you discovered about yourself in terms of leadership and how it formed you. Not that I'm trying to focus on CGIT, but I know it was a big part of your ...

JB: It was, of those early years, yes, and I taught Sunday school too. I'm sure my younger brothers and sisters would say that I was actually bossy and not a leader! [Laughter] And I'm sure that I was. My understanding of leadership has changed over the years, and I think a lot of that changed, too, in Alert Bay. I team taught with Hilda Sewid and we had the experience of being such close friends. We were similar in age, still in our late twenties, I guess. She had nine children and I had two. But we had a lot in common, mainly in that we loved the children and were delighted in what they were learning. It got so we could look across the room and know who was going to handle it and that kind of thing. So that was a great experience and that also taught me about teaming

and leadership, too. So I think that's probably informed my life, and that was when I decided not to go into a "regular classroom again with a solo teacher.

17:34

Then when Bob was called down to First United Church in Vancouver and when we came down here, I kept to that and decided I wouldn't do any supply teaching or anything. I had three little kids at this time, so I decided to volunteer. And I volunteered in Strathcona in the Downtown Eastside, because our hearts were involved in that, and there were housing projects there and so on. So my teaching career took a change because one of the teachers that I was working with ... I was working under her with a little boy who had learning disabilities. In the '60s we never talked about learning disabilities, but he obviously did have them and so she suggested, "You're doing more in a morning as a volunteer than the person who's paid as a children's aid, who's getting five dollars an hour." And I thought "Oh, I could make five dollars an hour, too." So I took Orton-Gillingham training, and worked through Children's Aid with children who had learning disabilities and actually emotional difficulties as well. And I did take a few courses at Simon Fraser University, too, to help with that.

I should just finish that part of my personal professional journey because a program was set up for the inner city schools in Vancouver, and my heart was really in the inner city schools. There were ten of us working in the schools and we formed a special team which was under the Vancouver Resources Board which later became the Ministry of Social Services. And so for eight or ten years – no, I'm sorry, not quite that long—anyway, it was a wonderful job because it combined all kinds of skills that I had and brought out my more creative side in terms of developing programs. And I worked with the local social worker in the social work office. We devised one of the first sex education programs for children/young people in elementary school, actually before the School Board was doing it, and we also developed and wrote a course for parents and had some of the ethnic communities give their input to that. So that was a great learning experience. And then the government at the time saw in its wisdom that ... they canceled that program because they said we hadn't any proof that it was doing any good. Well, it was not a study, we were actually doing the work in the schools. That was a real blow, and the school principals in Vancouver were wonderful in trying to support the programme, but it changed radically because I was working with classes as well as with children and new programmes were more individual. Anyway, these things happen.

Again, fortuitously, I was repositioned to a front line social work child protection job in the Downtown East Side, and I ended up three blocks from First United Church, and actually really began to appreciate First United as an advocacy centre, because often I couldn't get resources that I needed for the families and children I was working with who were all in the Downtown East Side area, and often First United Church could provide some services or push me in the right direction. So that was great. And then another challenge: I decided I wanted to go half time because it was very stressful, let's just say, so my supervisor said, "There's a half time job working with adults with mental handicaps." So for the last eight years of my professional career I worked in

the team that dealt with adults nineteen and over. So in a way, my career came around again because there was a lot of education and teaching involved in that as well as social work. I did take early retirement when systems began changing, and services became more computerized and less “people-oriented”, in my opinion. Anyway, I’m grateful for all those opportunities.

JL: I’m curious about the trajectory/relationship of your professional life choices and the influence of church and your faith on them. Is it learning about the social gospel that infuses you to serve the marginalized or was it being placed in Alert Bay, or was it geographic circumstance? I’m curious about the influences of each on the other and how and if it was your faith that influenced your professional choices or not. 21:53

JB: Probably subconsciously it did influence just the way I think about the world in general. Alert Bay certainly was a focal point in terms of broadening my theology to a much more liberal theology. Although, particularly in CGIT, I always was ... I was with another couple of good friends and we always pushed the system and asked a lot of questions, theologically, so I’m sure I was already in that sort of stream. But Alert Bay did, and we just loved the people there, and when we came down to First United, you know a lot of the people we knew up the coast, First Nations people, this is where they come for jobs, and so on. So I see it as a continuum. I guess also my own family - my mother was a social worker in the slums of Montreal in the early ‘30s; she graduated in one of the first post-grad classes from McGill in social work. She had her MA - her master’s - and my father was part of a... I guess nowadays you call it more left-wing liberal group of Untied Church, when he went through Emmanuel. Also there was always this interest in people from other countries, people that were different from ourselves, and a ministry of hospitality which my parents just had and which I think Bob and I have tried to carry on. It’s just sort of part of me.

JL: Yeah, interesting people at the table.

JB: Yeah, it goes back, yes. So probably it did influence me . But also I feel lucky that the opportunities have come, and because of ... I guess I see life sort of as a challenge and you do the best you can, and I was aided by people who believed in me to take the challenges that I didn’t think I could do. That’s a gift that I again got from my parents and my family as well as my supervisors in various work situations. I remember particularly going down to skid road for that front line job. I went for an interview, and I thought “What am I going to say, because I don’t have formal social work training.” The supervisor saw me and said, “Oh, I see you’re mature,” because I was in my forties by then, and then he said, “If a drunk comes into your office, what do you do?” And I said, “Well, first of all I’d get him a cup of coffee.” And he said, “Alright, you’re hired.” Which was sort of delightful, and I thought, “Hm!” As we talked after that he was saying, “Yes, you can do this,” predicting my enthusiasm, I think. I was very fortunate.

JL: One question indirectly tied to profession, I guess, because you've mentioned about volunteering for the church, and I'm curious as a woman in the 21st century, was it always just an assumption that it would be voluntary work that you'd do in the church, or did you have aspirations for paid accountable, or were there opportunities at that time, or was it more the role that you would volunteer your time? 25:51

JB: Two things: When I was in high school growing up in the '50s, there definitely were gender role assumptions. You'd be a nurse or a teacher. Well actually, ever since I was a little kid, because I had younger brothers and sisters, I liked "being the bossy teacher." I always wanted to be a teacher anyway and I liked learning and I liked the school system, and as I say I've changed a lot of my ideas, and schools and education have changed, thank goodness, too. There certainly was that role expectation, but also I really wanted to have a career. I was looking forward to having a career, but you make choice and you get married at a young age and then, I think as I've described, my experience changed. I mean, I loved teaching the first year I taught in Scotland, but as I got a family and realized that ... I guess I probably had a bit of the traditional role of the minister's wife in that work came first, because I believed in the work of the church, too. I knew that I couldn't work full time and bring up three kids with the other demands that were on the family. But I also felt a need to contribute something to the church.

I think that's really how my first volunteer job at the Conference level, other than just the usual things you'd do in a church congregation, although - I have to put a parenthetical remark - I never got to know church kitchens. I decided right from Alert Bay I was not going to do that. [Laughter] I should say in that regard that, one of the people I respect is a woman, Joyce Wilby, who is still alive, I think she's the librarian in Alert Bay still, she's considerably older than I am. Wonderful woman, and she said, the year that I was teaching school, she said to the UCW group, "We won't ask Joan to do any baking or to help with this particular event," - I don't know what it was that was coming up - "because she's working in the pre-school for First Nations children, and that's something that the rest of us can't do." I really appreciated that and fortunately got to go back years later and say to Joyce, "That was very meaningful for me."

So I guess I didn't see myself as in that role, but I did want to contribute and I think the first thing, getting back to your question, was when I was asked to be on the Conference Native Affairs Committee, and Bob Sullivan and later John Cashore were the staff people. I really appreciated working with them. So I guess that combined an ability to do some leading and just in terms of plain committee work, which I found very easy to do, and the fact that I was concerned about the Native People. It seemed like a natural thing to do.

JL: And did you volunteer on that committee after you'd come to Vancouver?

JB: Yes. That was actually all after I got to Vancouver.

JL: Two part question: a) What was it about the committee that inspired you to want to be on it, and b) What was your role on the committee?

JB: I'd have to think back ... I think I was just asked to join the committee by John Cashore, for the reasons that I stated, and then I was the chair, I think for two or three years. I had also been very involved as a volunteer with the Board of the Parent Co-operative Pre-Schools, too, so I was sort of doing something in the community and then something in the church as well. 30:07

JL: All connected, too.

JB: Yes.

JL: While we're on the topic of committees, etc. you've been connected with, we might as well keep going. So what were some of the other positions that you've held?

JB: Just two others, which went for an extended period of time, I'm sure at least a decade. From the late '80s all through the '90s mostly, I guess, was Presbytery Education and Students. And again I was just asked to do it and it seemed to be something that I could do because I liked students. So I served on that for many years, and then I was asked to be on the Conference Interview Board, so I did that for I think three to four...I'm not sure. I felt it was long.

JL: How many candidates do you think you saw go through?

JB: I have no idea, I just couldn't tell you. Probably ... a couple of dozen, probably, over the years. And then one year I did some supervision of an Anglican student under Jim McCullum at VST.

JL: And what did that involve, supervision of him?

JB: Well, he had a pastorate in an Anglican church, and the other lay person supervising, who actually happened to be a friend of mine who was from that church, and myself and the candidate met about every two weeks . The candidate had learning goals and the church had certain expectations and it was not an easy job, but Jim McCullum was wonderful. Very, very helpful. He's another one of my mentors.

JL: And I'm curious about the [Education and Students] and Candidacy committees, just curious to know while you were on them, did you notice a difference in the expectations of education for ministers or did you notice the demands for ministry changing while you were on the committee, or the characteristics of people feeling the call change over time?

JB: I would say yes for all three of those things. Very interesting, yes, and of course the church changed their regulations so you had to keep adjusting as to what we were called to do, which was different from five years before. It was an

interesting experience, because I had one very painful experience, along with some other people, of a candidate who was ordained who a lot of us ... some of us, but obviously not enough, were really concerned about for the future of the church and that was hard. Again, I learned a lot from it and it was another senior church person who had a psychiatric background who was extremely helpful in questioning and dealing with another particularly difficult situation where the person just could not hear what was being said and what the committee was concerned about and so on. So again, life is a learning experience. We often had to deal with people who either don't understand the question or couldn't internalize the real meaning.

JL: I'm not supposed to lead you, but I'm observing it must be hard when someone has a deep-set belief in a call from God and can't hear, can't be in communion with it. Must be tough.

JB: It was difficult, yes, but again, you do the best you can and none of us are perfect; we're all fallible.

JL: So one of the questions I was going to ask you I think we've answered, but I'll ask it anyway just in case there's more to it. What I think the answer is is that you have a passion for education and for the classroom and for teaching styles, but the question is: What prompted you to use your time in this way? On the candidacy, on [Education and Students], on the committee ... all those voluntary committees which take a lot of our time.

JB: They do, they really do, yes. They take a lot of time and energy and thought. I think of a friend who once said to me: "Whenever I am faced with a challenge to be on a committee to do something, I use three criteria: is it something I can mean? Are there people whom I respect and with whom I would be happy to work? And thirdly, is there any fun involved?" And certainly for me, the Education and Students Committee fulfilled those criteria because it included a passion for young people and for their learning process.

I also have good memories of Don Robertson, Kathy Bentall and others with whom I worked on the Conference Water Project – where we struggled with new and effective ways to "be the church"

JL: That's great. Was there one group or one period of time or one subject area that held more passion and inspiration for you than any other?

JB: I think the Education of Students, because you got to know students as they were going through the process. 36:54

JL: Right. And do you see some of those students in ministry now?

JB: Do you know, I haven't. I haven't, because most of them have scattered. It was twenty-five years ago, too. Thirty years ago, maybe; I was on it for a while.

JL: Do you ever have inklings of...?

JB: Oh yes, yes. I often hear about some of them and read about them in the *Observer*, if they've written a letter to the *Observer*, and I find that sort of interesting.

JL: And is there every a morning when you wake up and think, "Oh, I could do that again, I'd serve on that again one more time."

(Chuckling)

JB: Well, I think there should be younger people, I really do. I feel quite strongly that there is a termination point and the big secret is to know when you should move on and give somebody else a chance. And besides, ideas probably wouldn't even be on where I think mine have moved to, so it takes new blood. But we'll come back to that, probably, when we talk about the church.

JL: What I would love to ask from you now is if there were any significant role models or people who influenced the way you saw the church or the way you saw how to be in the church or serving the church in your life. And they could be from childhood or from today.

38:12

JB: Well, I think I mentioned an early CGIT leader and another one who taught me other things from a more negative point of view. And I feel very privileged because we've known so many interesting clergy, both male and female, and I would say in the course of the last fifty years, probably two or three have been very helpful to me in my spiritual journey, very supportive of me as a person, encouraging me to take committee roles, just as John Cashore did, as well as Glen Baker, during the years we were members of Dunbar Church – that would be the Education Committee, so that would be the end of the '70s.

More currently, I'm really appreciating what I'm learning form the clergy in our own church, where we go. In a more secular way, well it's not really secular because he was a clergy too, but people at VST, several of them, and certainly Jim McCullum in terms of my growth. Those latterly happened to be men, but also there were a couple of teachers and social workers that I worked with, and one of the social workers, one of my supervisors, she was just great. So I just feel like I've been privileged to know a lot of very fine people who did what they did with integrity and sensitivity and not afraid to be very direct when I needed to hear it. And one of them, when I said I was really trying but I wasn't doing a very good job, and the response was "Yes, Joan, sometimes you're very trying."

(Laughter)

In other words, a good sense of humour. And I think that's the other thing that I've appreciated about my colleagues, and particularly in social work, although it happened to be a clergy person who said that to me. But we've known a lot of very, very fine clergy and lay people and pastors where Bob has been. I just

feel very privileged. And also, I think, when you're talking about mentors, I know it sounds funny but I should say that my mom was a mentor. She lived until she was almost a hundred and she was always supportive and yet wasn't afraid to speak her mind and tell me when I was on the wrong track. But she set a great example for hospitality and for social justice issues and so on. So when you grow up with that kind of atmosphere and background that, too, is a privilege. Just a privilege of birth.

JL: And it would almost take more effort to not get involved in things because you've been so exposed to people who have been involved in things, you know? I want to move onto a couple of questions about gender relations over the years, because I know with each generation, women lay the foundation for the generation coming and make it easier and easier each decade, so how do you see your gender affecting your participation in the church and was there ever a defining moment when you saw a great headway for women and the work of women in church and in social justice work or a defining moment where you thought, "Oh, I see where the limitations are here." Just curious about the role that gender played, if it did.

JB: I've thought a lot about it, and I was never conscious that it did, and it's interesting because when we were in Alert Bay, that was the same time Betty Friedan wrote her ground breaking book and my mother sent me a copy, believe it or not. That was really when the women's liberation movement and feminist movement were taking off, in the early '60s. So I think my generation have seen a great advance in that, although I must confess in university and so on, I never felt any ... I really didn't feel any difference. I was on student council, I was on the council of my college, the university, and I went representing with a male colleague and a Catholic theologian staff person representing Toronto, we went to World University Service 3 week Seminar in Ghana and we never felt any difference. That actually was a very definitive part of my life, which I should have mentioned, because somebody said it was like a golden thread running through our lives, all of us that had that privilege to go as university students and live for twelve weeks in, in our case, West Africa.

43:07

So I never noticed it there and I honestly cannot recall, and I really have thought about this, but I can't recall personally ... but then maybe I'm just in an elite group, or a privileged group that haven't noticed that. I think I've been in conversations where it's obvious that other people were not keen on a female clergy coming or something like that, and I think it took some of us a little adjusting to get used to that, but it was never a big thing with me. As I say, I'm just very privileged that I haven't experienced it. Maybe it was there and I was just too naïve or too concerned about going on with what I saw, the agenda, to notice it, and that's quite possible.

JL: Well, that's a good thing; that's great.

JB: And I'm very aware that that's not been everybody else's experience, because I've certainly heard that from a lot of people. So I'm probably not a very good

judge of that.

JL: Well, we all get to experience different experiences, positive and negative, so that's fine. Before we move to the next piece, do you want to expand a bit on your Ghana experience and what that held for you? 46:09

JB: Well, certainly it fits in with the trajectory of social justice. It was very ... sorry, it's very easy just to let the mind wander a bit, because it was so valuable in so many ways, and I've kept in touch with many of those people over the years. We're a small group, but a very privileged group, and we're coming up sixty years, it will be sixty years since we went. So there's still communication between us, and I think all of us have done something in our lives that was related to that experience. It may just be in small ways, as in my case. Some other people became cabinet ministers and did very up-front activities for this country.

JL: And was it because of the people you met or the different way of life that you saw?

JB: Both, because I can remember standing ... we came back and we'd had our evaluations and so on in London on the way back, and I can still remember standing on the street corner the day we got back to New York and a couple of other people with me, and we just stood there, at all this traffic and everything, and we all looked at each other and we all practically said the same thing: "We are so totally changed that somehow this is not ... it is unbelievable to think of the inequalities." I guess that's the simplest way of describing it: the inequalities in the world, and I think we all had been very anxious to continue our involvement in working to eradicate them.

And so years later – I guess the one thing I'm doing now that's sort of related to that is that years later I was in Kenya and, thanks again to friends, I met a wonderful woman who is just retiring now who is head of ANPPCAN, which is the African Network for the Protection and Prevention of Children from Child Abuse and Neglect. They had a project in one of the big slums, Korogocho, on the outside of Nairobi, a big slum of two million people. The staff person in charge of some home daycares took me out there and I visited these little ten by ten tin shacks, dirt floors, where the women had an extremely rudimentary "Home Daycares". I met with the women from eight different tribes who were all working together to make their community better. And I said, "What can I tell my friends back in Canada?" And they said, "Tell them we're trying to keep our children safe," because it was not a safe community in any way, and it's worse now than it was even in 2005. So then I said, "Well, what can we do?" And they sort of looked at the staff person and it turned out that a Danish foundation had been raising and sending them money and they were no longer able to do it, and they needed money. So I went back and told the story to the rest of my little travel group, and they said, "Oh my goodness, you really were seeing people, and we just went to a zoo," or something. So they said, "When you get back, write us a letter and let's raise some money for them."

We've raised anywhere between five and ten thousand a year ever since, but it's simply by word of mouth, whatever local church we were at, and my friends across the country – all my friends that had gone to Ghana together – many of them have been very faithful contributors and so I just sent off another twenty-five hundred dollar US wire this week and we raised about sixty-five hundred this year. So that's my African connection, which is unfortunately not as direct as I would have liked over the years, because my two good friends had died very early, one of them in childbirth when she was in her twenties, and so I lost contact with her husband and with the family. So I don't have that, but you may have heard of Kathy Knowles and her Osu Children's Library Project, so I've been quite involved in that, have gotten to know Kathy, and I'm just a supporter but that keeps me in touch with what's going on there. She started just reading to kids in her backyard, and it's the power of one story, and then she saw these little black heads along the fence, and she invited them in, and she converted a bedroom for a library and then her husband got one of these containers, and now there are hundreds of community-run libraries. She's done this just in twenty-five years, which is incredible. Sorry, I'm diverging but you can see that I'm still interested ... still passionate about Africa, and libraries of course fit in with ...

JL: Education!

JB: Education, right.

JL There's a stream here.

JB: There is a little stream.

JL: I want to move us to talking a little bit about church and I have a few sub-questions for you about looking to the future of the church. What direction do you hope it takes and what do you hope to see happen in the church in the coming future? And how might you like to stay involved in church life, because that might shift and change with time as well, right? And I can ask them all again if you want to do it one at a time.

52:22

JB: I don't know what way the church is going and that is, I think, both good and bad. Well, not bad, but it's scary because we don't know what the church is going to look like. I don't think it will look anything like the church of my childhood and youth, nor perhaps, should it because I think it became very formalized. I'm very grateful to be part of the United Church because I have lots of friends who are in other faiths and other parts of the Christian church and I'm very proud of the United Church and its breadth of acceptance for people from very small-C conservative to small-L liberal.

[Phone rings and tape recorder is paused]

JB: We got interrupted by distractions in the background, so I'm not sure I quite finished the question, but I think part of it was: how do I hope that the church

might be going? I hope that we can continue to be creative and find new ways of reaching out to the community and reaching people who are looking for a spiritual depth. One of my learnings, of course, was from the First Nations people and their concept of the Great Spirit and how much we have in common, and I really think, particularly in these days when there's a lot of antagonism towards other religions and races, unfortunately, and at this time in history, I just think it's really important to be inclusive.

Perhaps the old idea of the house church will take flight again, where people can meet in smaller groups and talk about their faith and I just think the church is going to take many, many different forms. Maybe we will always have a cathedral church in big cities, and then people will do other things and learn in other ways, and I think that's good. I'm anxious that we not slip back into doctrinarism and that we keep open to the Spirit that moves in many, many ways.

Certainly I've moved a long, long way in my own theology. I couldn't agree to some of the things that in 1925, the beginning of the United Church, were considered *de rigueur*. Again, most of us can sort of do the translation of theological gobble-dee-gook that we get thrown at us sometimes from pulpits and so on, and there are other theologians, Borg and Spong, and contemplative prayer groups and all kinds of things that I think add a richness to the church. At this stage, I decided that by the time I'm eighty, which I've just turned, I've given a lot of volunteer time to the church and I'm quite happy to do little ad hoc things. Gosh, I even made cookies and put them in the church freezer, I mean that's not something I ever did in a previous life, but I was making them for somebody else.

JL: The freezer in the kitchen?

[Laughter]

JB: In the church kitchen, yes. So they could have it, because our own church does a lot of entertaining, as it were, serving meals and so on ... I am not the least bit interested in serving on long-term committees anymore. I've sort of had it with committee work, and in the professional life you spend a lot of time on committees too, and I'm done with that. I actually feel, at this stage, I need to be getting my house in order in terms of going through some of those old files, making sure I've thrown out all the things I need to throw out and get things in order so I don't leave a big job for my family after I go. And also I need to be filled. Because I think you can spend a lot of your life giving out and there comes a point where you really need to be...

JL: Replenished.

JB: Replenished, yes. And fortunately we happen to be going to a church that does that for me, and it's just wonderful to be able to participate in the worship, be challenged and also be stirred by good music. And I know that that's something that many people don't have the privilege of doing, but I'm very grateful.

JL: Good, good. Well, may you be filled.

JB: And it's over to you young people!

JL: We'll carry the mantle.

JB: I know. We're counting on it.

JL: So, my second last question for you is: If you were to do it all over again, what would you change and what would you keep the same? 58:36

JB: I can't really answer that question because I think a lot of my life was responding to challenges. I did the best I could with the knowledge and skills I had at the time. I do look back with gratefulness and with a sense of "Ah! What an interesting life I've had. Aren't I fortunate?" But I don't look back in terms of saying "I wish I hadn't done that." I often think, "Oh, I wish I'd known then what I know now," but one can't do anything about that.

JL: That's true. Good. So my last question for you is that we have talked about a lot, but I'm sure that there's ten times more that we haven't talked about. Is there anything pressing in your mind or in your heart that we haven't touched on that you want to share?

JB: I don't think so, I think the only thing I can think of just now is in relation to the gender. I'm very glad that women are able to take more responsible roles in the church, but I hope we don't get to the point - well, no, I'll voice it positively: I think both men and women have their contributions to make and we all - some of my friends who think like I do, and we like to consider ourselves not rabid feminists, but we certainly are feminists - we wish that there were certain areas where women were more respected and could take more responsibility, but I think the other side of that is we need to do it in tandem with men who have different gifts, and among women we have many, many different gifts, and I think that's one of the things that we all have to work on, and I think work on from the pre-school level in terms of inclusivity and working together and listening. Listening. And working on consensus models. And that applies in the church and outside of it.

JL: Definitely. Anything else?

JB: I can't think of anything at the moment. Thank you, Julie. It's rather an honour to be considered among the group of women you're interviewing. Some of them I know and I know are very fine people and have given great leadership in the church.

JL: I would just like to finish saying that on behalf of the United Church, I'd like to thank you for this time that you have spent with me and for the willingness you have shared your stories and for the incredible work you have given to the church. So thank you.

JB: Well, you give me more credit than is due, really, but I thank you.

JL: And this ends the interview.

62:00