



BC Conference
The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada

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Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Marion Best

March 21, 2017

Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Marion Best (MB)
Date of Interview: March 21, 2017
Transcribed by: Katherine Chambers

Interviewed by: Julie Lees (JL)
Auditor of Transcription: Marion Best

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07:03	Movement into full-time church vocation
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JL: This is a recording for the Making Room for Women project of the BC Conference, United Church of Canada Archives. My name is Julie Lees and I am interviewing Marion Best on March 21, 2017. Marion, do I have your permission to proceed with the interview? 00:02

MB: Yes, you do.

JL: Excellent. So, when I was reading through and learning about you, it was quite overwhelming how much you have done for the church and with the church and in the church, voluntarily and paid. I know you've been interviewed before and so for this interview I hope we can look at your work through the lens of women in the church. And, just to set the scene, perhaps you could share some brief information with me about where you were born and how you found your way into The United Church of Canada.

MB: I was born in New Westminster, the Royal Columbian Hospital, and I think I was about six when I was first sent off to the local church, which was a little gospel hall. I remember loving the Biblical stories and they had lovely little leaflets with nice pictures on the front, and I'd take them home and read them and re-read them, and the people there were lovely and I loved it there until I was about ten or eleven when I started asking questions like: "If Adam and Eve only had two sons, where did the rest of the people come from?" And basically it was, "You don't question." And I had so loved those Bible stories, and then when I started to ask questions about them, it wasn't okay. I was about twelve when I decided I would help in the kindergarten, and that way I didn't have to go to church and I didn't have to...

[Chuckling]

MB: Because the people were lovely. And the music was lively; I remember that being fun, too. So by the time I was about thirteen or fourteen, I just stopped going and never went near a church again. My parents' comment was, that they had enough church when they were growing up, so they didn't need anymore.. When Jack and I were planning to be married, his mother in particular was quite active at Sixth Avenue United, and Bernie Ennals was the minister at the time, and it was quite a thriving congregation, really, at the time. So we went for marriage prep, to him, and we did go to church a few times. And then when our first child was born, I knew I wanted her to be baptized, because I hadn't been baptized as a child.

So I went back to see the minister, even though we'd been sparse about going to church, and he said, "Well, you know the church is feeling that we should only be baptizing children of members." And I said, "Well, I don't know enough to be a member, but I know I really want this child to be baptized." He said, "Well, these are the things that you would need to believe." And I had no trouble believing those, and would find out later they weren't much different than what you would say if you were joining the church. So anyway Cathie was baptized, and I took very seriously those vows that I would raise this child in

Christian nurture, and so from then on, I was right there. We were living in Sapperton at the time, so Shiloh was just being built and we started going to Shiloh, and subsequently had three more children. So they were all baptized at Shiloh, except for Cathie at Sixth Avenue. But I've often thought, you know, if he had turned us away, I don't know if I'd ever have been in the church. It was very significant.

JL: And did you become a member?

MB: I did, a year later. Art Carr was the minister then at Shiloh, and I said, "Well, I need classes, because I don't know very much," and so he had membership classes and then I was both baptized and confirmed at the same time.

JL: Wow, that must have been a big day.

MB: It was. It was, yeah. And that was before the second child was baptized. By the time the rest of them came along I was actually a member.

JL: That's great. Adult baptisms are very sacred, cause it's people who have thought through it very carefully.

MB: The thing I remember when I first went into the United Church was I thought the music was a little dull compared to what I remembered of this little gospel hall.

[Chuckling]

MB: But the sermons were amazing. He was a great preacher, Art Carr.

JL: And so when I was listening to the *Pressure Point* interview that you had, you spoke about your nursing as being a form of ministry. I picked up on the words "consensus," certainly from other church work as well, "conflict management," "forgiveness", and how you used those Christian thoughts of reconciliation and forgiveness in more secular terms, and nursing was a ministry for you, and so I'm wondering if you could share with us your journey from letting go of nursing and moving into a more absorbed full-time church vocation.

MB: Well, I graduated from nursing, got married, had four children, and I stopped nursing as soon as I was married and didn't go back for fifteen years. I only worked for two months after I graduated [... Laughter ...], and then when Greg started school I realized that I wasn't happy at home with no children there. It was great as long as I had little kids. In those days they were really desperate for nurses and so they had kept calling me during those years—I lived two blocks from the hospital and I was active in the Alumnae—and they would call me and say, "Couldn't you come back and at least do relief work or something?" And so after Greg started school, I said, "Well, I'm ready for a conversation."

07:03

So they actually sponsored me to take a critical care course and I did relief two days a week in emergency and ICU and a new Trauma Unit that had been built at the time. And I didn't want to be away from the children so, it's hard to believe now, but I said, "I will come to work as long as I only work two days a week, no weekends, no shifts, only daytime, and only days that the children are in school." So no summer, no over Christmas, because I really thought it was important to always be there. And seven to three thirty made it possible to be home when the kids got home from school.

So I did that for eight years and then I had this really strong urge—I had been taking a few courses here [at VST]—and I had a strong urge to study theology. And Jack and I had decided that ... he had a business background, and if I studied theology, that in five years' time the kids would be gone and we would say to the church, "Could you use us somewhere?" And then I ran into the roadblock that I didn't have an undergraduate degree. I had a nursing diploma, but I didn't have a degree. So I couldn't come in here unless I wanted to be a candidate for the B.Th, and I said, "But I don't want to be ordained." "Well, then, you can't come here." So I was one year short of a nursing degree and I decided to go back and finish that.

So I started in September, and one night—I had been teaching in the Sunday school and all of that was what really got me involved in the church in a fairly big way—and I got a call just as the youth group was leaving. And these were kids that we'd had ever since they were in kindergarten, and we saw them right through to grade twelve, so we had these grade 10 to 12 kids at the house and we had just been doing Abraham and Sarah, and the phone rang, and it was Ivan Cummings saying, "We've got a vacancy at Naramata Centre," (and we had gone to the Centre every year through that period of time for at least twelve years). And he said, "We can only afford one person, but we really need two. We have other applicants, but we were wondering if you and Jack would like to apply for the job. And we've divided it so that he would do PR and fund raising and you would do the program administration work." Well, we prayed about that for a month, and finally we decided to apply, and if we were asked to go we'd see it as a call. And if we weren't, then we'd continue with the plan.

We were asked to go. So Jack closed up his business and the three girls were, by that time, working or at university, and only Greg came with us. He was in grade ten and he came with us and I worked at the Centre for ten years, Jack for three, and then he retired and I went full time when he retired. And his job was to raise a million dollars to build the Maple Court units; he had done that, and ... you know, he'd worked since he was 18 and he was ready to quit. And I was ready to go.

So then I moved from program administration more into program leadership. And a lot of the learning was like an apprenticeship. I worked alongside really good people who taught me a lot, and that's where my process skills were the best thing I had to offer. I did end up—the staff would be available to work with other groups and so I got to work with the BC Nurses' Union. They would

come to the Centre for their training, and I would do assertiveness training and conflict resolution with nurses, and after I left the Centre in '87, I did freelance work. I worked with Bud Phillips here [at VST] with something called the Centre for Study of Church and Ministry. And we did consultation with—oh, I must have worked with eighty congregations over a period of time. It was called “Congregational Revitalisation”. And I would be asked to work often with nurses and hospital teams, particularly with the changes that were going on in hospitals at the time. So that felt like ministry working with those people.

JL: And so when you were kind of thinking, “I’ll go to theology school and I’ll learn more about theology, I’m volunteering in the Sunday school, I’m telling the stories I love to tell,” were you just thinking about that with a heart of curiosity? Did you ever imagine that it would blossom into all the opportunities and places and things you’ve done? Or were you hoping that it would just be a nicely contained “I’ll just volunteer for this and I’ll learn about this.” Where was your mind at that time and were you aspiring to things?

MB: No, no there were no aspirations for anything. The big thing was to work with children. That’s where it all started, was working with children in the congregation and being sent to one of these Observation Practice Schools in 1965, and meeting Jessie McLeod there, Conference Minister at the time for Christian Education, and she just tapped me on the shoulder and said, “You know, you should go to Naramata.” And I said, “I’ve never heard of it.” And so the next summer I went to Naramata and spent the week with our children, and it was just such an amazing experience to be there for a full week, and Olive Sparling, who was the author of a lot of the New Curriculum material around how to work with children, she was the one leading that full week, and Elaine Peacock (I don’t know you if you know Elaine?) but she was a diaconal minister who worked with the primary age group, and I couldn’t believe how much I learned in that week because it was experiential. That’s how my nursing had been. You read about gall bladders and you learned all about them, and then you interviewed somebody who was going to have their gall bladder out then you went to the surgery with them and then you nursed them afterwards. Everything was reinforced, and that’s how it was.

I moved from the Shiloh thing to Jessie saying, “We need to do these Observation Schools all around and we need people to do that.” And that’s when we pulled together a group of people: Anne Searcy looked after the kindergarten, I looked after the primary, and somebody else looked after the juniors, and Saturdays that’s what we would do. We would go Friday nights and Saturdays to the churches and work with the children there while teachers observed. And I did that into the ‘70s. And then at Naramata Centre I would go every summer and do the same thing at the Centre.

JL: Teaching it.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

JL: How many churches do you think you went to?

MB: In those days? Oh, my goodness, there would have been forty or more. All over the Fraser Valley and a couple on the island, but we were mostly Vancouver, and a place like Mission would sponsor it, and so people from Abbotsford and the Area would come to the church. We did lots of them. That was really where I was, and in the meantime I got asked to be on the Conference Staffing Committee. So I was on the staffing committee that had the first Presbytery Officer appointed. The first Personnel Minister appointed. It was in the '60s. And then the Board of Christian Education was having its last meeting, and the person who should have gone to the meeting couldn't go and they asked me to go. So that was my first national meeting, and I also went to a national consultation with John O'Neill, who was Conference staff at that time. He and I represented BC in a meeting that was all about children and children's faith development and it was so significant, really significant. People from all across the country. So that was my first national training event, and then the Board of CE was my first national meeting, and just met all these people that I'd only read about: Peter Gordon White and Gordon Freer and all these people who had written the New Curriculum materials. It was amazing.

That Board went out of existence when the Division of Mission in Canada came into being. And in '71 I was elected as the B.C. lay rep to the Division of Mission in Canada and at the first meeting I was elected to the executive of the Division of Mission in Canada. And then I went to my first General Council in '77 just as we moved to Naramata. That General Council established the Theology and Faith Committee. There were two lay women: Jean Hamilton and I were appointed to that Committee along with people like Bob Smith and Paul Newman and Frank Meadows and Ralph Donnelly and Douglas Hall. I was on there for six years, and talk about a marvelous education.

JL: Yeah, that was your theological education.

MB: Totally. It was marvelous! And then after that I was on a couple of other committees and then I guess President of [BC] Conference in '87 and '88, and probably the General Council in '88 was the most significant experience of my life. No, I never sought any of those things; it was just people coming along saying, "Do you want to do this?" It was always an invitation.

JL: It was always someone seeking you out.

MB: Always.

JL: I imagine, because stereotypically work with the children was a woman's contribution in the church ... did you notice any changes? When you were doing these things and going to different events on behalf of work with children, were you received differently than when you started taking on roles that were to do with the functioning of the church and the future of the church, or did you not notice any difference?

MB: No, because, except for that Board of CE meeting, I really was not there because of children's work. When I went to Division of Mission in Canada, I

was representing BC Conference, which was all the educational ministry, all the outreach ministry, home missions, the Thomas Crosby. It was everything that used to be the Board of Home Missions, and the Board of CE, and the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Board of Men, Board of Women, all those got combined into Division of Mission in Canada. So it was a much broader thing, and there was a Division of Mission in Canada in BC. So I was, by that time, no longer doing the children's representation. Anne Searcy had taken that on.

JL: But you were still welcomed in the same way, regardless of the role.

MB: Well I was, yeah. But I also recognized that women were clearly a minority in the places I was. Very much a minority.

JL: Okay, and so back track one second: when you were just starting with the New Curriculum and doing the observation training, and you had no aspirations or didn't even imagine that life would explode the way it did in the church, did you assume that everything you were going to do would be voluntary, or were there models for paid accountable positions that women were in?

MB: I always assumed it would be volunteer. And when I told you about how Jack and I had talked to the church, saying, "Could you use us somewhere?" we didn't know if that would be overseas or if it would be in a Native community. We just thought there would be some place we could be useful. I guess we would have needed some minimal salary, but because the children would all have been gone and because we'd provided for their education and they were pretty independent people, we just thought, "we're free to do whatever." And that was the plan. But when Naramata Centre came in, it was five years earlier than we'd planned. The salary was meager, but we could live on it. To be fair, we owned our home in New Westminster and so we were able to buy a home in Naramata. So we had our house, we knew the kids would be educated, and so we didn't need a lot.

JL: So you could purely move into roles of service.

MB: Yeah.

JL: That's great. Before we move into some nitty gritty about chronology and positions, I just wondered if there were perhaps one or two role models, either from your childhood or as you started to watch and know and learn the church system that influenced you or inspired you or made you feel like you could say "yes" to these roles that were coming your way.

24:21

MB: Well certainly Jessie McLeod was very significant. I think what I learned from her was how important it was to approach people that you saw had promise, and to encourage them and to support them, and to challenge them, too. I remember one time when there was going to be an Observation Practice

School, and Jessie was doing something else, couldn't be there, and Ivan's—I think it was his mother, or his dad, died—and he had to go suddenly, and she said, "I know you can do it. I know you can run that school." Well, I didn't know I could do it. But I did. And she gave me support—"There will be these things to think about"—so often I was challenged but I don't think I was ever left unsupported. So Jessie was very significant. There was a minister at Shiloh, Del Johnstone, who also was encouraging and supportive. He really was. And I think, nationally, there were certainly ... there weren't a lot of women, when I think about it. There weren't a lot of women. It was Jessie. And somebody who took me under his wing, theologically, was Jack Shaver. We were on some committees together and there was a point at Shiloh when we had a minister who was very difficult, and he ended up having to leave. So it was almost like Jack became my minister during that period. So if there was biblical stuff I wanted to talk about, or I needed help with the study group, it was Jack I would go to. So he supported. Albion Wright in the Division of Mission in Canada really became like a mentor, helping me find my way around the national church. Very significant.

JL: It's so much better not to just be thrown in somewhere, eh, but have the chance to be guided and supported along the way.

MB: Oh, yeah. And then I met other women like Yvonne Stewart. She took on the children's job in the national church after Olive Sparling retired, and I was actually part of the group that appointed her. And we became good friends, more like peers, supporting each other in a lot of ways. There was a woman who chaired Division of Mission in Canada, Peg Smith, who was a pretty stern ... I found myself in a mix of thinking, "She really is on top of stuff, but if she were just a bit more gracious ..."

[Laughter]

MB: So I kind of learned ... I think it was a combination of the meetings I went to and watched how people moderated them, and my process skills, which I think were pretty good, that got me to the point where I think I knew how to run a meeting where people felt free to participate but it never got out of hand. I think some of my moderating was probably my best gift, particularly with the World Council of Churches. I know it was. Because the moderating there was open to improvement.

[Laughter]

JL: I know you've been interviewed before about the Sessional Committee No. 8, right, and I watched the interview on YouTube where you explained your process with lots of silence and individual and corporate prayer and scripture reading and agreement for consensus but then going to a vote if that didn't work. Just lots of contributions and participation for all involved, and that happened before World Council of Churches. And so I imagine that—please confirm, don't let me put words in your mouth—I imagine that was a very forming time for you, Sessional Committee No. 8, and would you say that that

29:05

was where a lot of your moderation skills gelled or did you come into that Sessional Committee already with a lot of skills?

MB: Well, I had a lot of skill working with groups. I was a lab trainer. I must have started the lab work around 1980, and we would have a series of labs: there was the Basic and then the Group Skills and Design Skills and Conflict Resolution and Personal Growth. And there was the Training of Trainers, and I also ended up leading those. So that probably was ... I think I was pretty skilled at working with the group by the time ... and it was like a group, because there were around 24 of us.

JL: And those were nursing labs?

38:12

MB: No, no. This is church, Naramata Centre. Human Relations, Human Potential.

JL: Ah, good, good. And that was when you were a part of evolving Naramata into a more psychological exploration, artistic renewal, that kind of thing?

MB: Well, it was on that path before I went there. Because the whole National Training Laboratories (NTL) in the States ... At the time that the New Curriculum was developed, there was a fellow named Alvin Cooper who worked at the national church, who I never met (I only heard about him), who had lots of training with NTL, and so he started bringing people together across the church for this kind of training. Sent them to NTL, and then established trainers in Canada—and Ivan Cumming was one of those to Naramata Centre. I think it had good theological roots to help people recognize not only their own potential, but the potential in others. And to recognize the gifts that were in any group that met, you know? How do you surface those, and how do you honour them? That was a lot of what it was about. I think it was very theologically sound. I know people said, “Well, it’s just a humanistic thing,” but it wasn’t.

JL: Well, and it’s so funny when people distinguish the humanistic thing, because we are children of God, we are filled with God’s energy, so to be human is to have God with us.

MB: Yeah. And the ‘88 thing was very significant for me. I had no idea it would be as significant as it was.

JL: And why did you have no idea it would be as significant as it was?

MB: Maybe I didn’t know that my role in it would be as significant. I knew the decision was significant because I’d been President of Conference and I had chaired the meeting at BC Conference that went on until two in the morning, because we were the first Conference to meet, and we were under the impression that we had to do something with every petition that we had. We had 280 of them or something. They wouldn’t agree to group ones that were similar; no, everyone had to be dealt with separately. And so we did, and I

knew how difficult the whole thing was going to be, but I didn't know that I would become associated with it, particularly. I didn't know that. And it was heartbreaking at times, because the Sessional Committee had the whole spectrum. I mean, we had five Community of Concern people, a United Church Renewal person, we had two people who declared they were Friends of Affirm. So we had that spectrum, and somehow by just listening to one another, and honouring each other's positions, we were able to come up with that statement and then take it to the Council and just have the Council tear at it, and everybody lining up at procedural mikes. It felt so awful, and partly that General Council was in an auditorium. It wasn't around tables. So you could only talk, at most, to the person sitting next to you. So there was no opportunity. And somebody said, "Yeah, it's fine for you, you had time in that committee" and if only people could have had the same experience that we've had I think it would have been different.

But I got to the point where I was trying to ... there was the person who was sort of the head of Affirm at the time, and there was the person who was the head of the Community of Concern, and I was going between them saying, "Well if we did this, if we did that," and thought we had some agreement, and then on the floor they rebutted it. And so I just ended up ... I don't know if that was part of the interview that you saw ... but it was lunchtime and I found a room by myself and I went in there and it was a room where the leftover communion bread was from the communion that morning, and it had been a communion that had been led by Sue Laverty, a lesbian from Naramata, who worked with Children at Council, and the children had done the worship that day, and you know I just sat there and I read Psalm 131 that says something like, "These things are too much for me. I'm like a child at its mother's breast and I have to trust." And so it was like this weight came off and I thought, "It's not up to me. Why did I think I was supposed to make this work?" And in the end it did pass, but not without a lot of rancour. It was heartbreaking.

JL: I imagine it must have been quite an emotional shake-up to come from the challenge of the Committee chat and disagreement but eventual consensus to the floor. I imagine you'd be standing there, reading through the process and reading through the motion thinking, "Great, we've done this work on your behalf, we've worked really hard," and then all of a sudden everyone's saying, "Nope, nope, nope, nope, challenge, challenge, challenge." I would have been shaking in my boots if I were in your shoes.

MB: Well, you know there were just points when ... and to try not to seem disapproving. Because you have your right to have your opinion, but there were just some awful things said and hurtful things, you know. Anyway, we got through that. And that year I had already agreed before that General Council to chair the General Council Inter-Church, Inter-Faith Committee. Partly because that daughter whose baptism had brought me into the church had converted to Judaism. And so I said, well, there's no way I'm going to be alienated from my children, so I will learn everything I can learn about Judaism. And so that got me really interested in the inter-faith things, and because I chaired that Committee, I became a delegate to the World Council Assembly in Canberra in

1991. And they were pretty sure that a United Church person would always be on the Central Committee, because we were pretty big supporters, and there would be 150 on the Central Committee, so I was okay with that. And then, to my surprise, I got elected to the executive, which was about 20 people and some staff. So there'd be about 24 at executive meetings. So I found myself going to Geneva three times a year for executive meetings. Talk about feeling overwhelmed! I knew Lois had been on the executive...

JL: Lois Wilson?

MB: Yeah, and she wouldn't be an easy person to follow and our styles were not the same, and I thought, "Oh, gee, what are they going to be expecting?" But actually, it turned out fine. And then the next Assembly they asked me to stay on. Then they—whoever "they" were (some nominating committee)—nominated me to be Vice-Moderator. And so there was the Moderator, who was Armenian Orthodox, His Holiness, [laughter] and the other Vice-Moderator was an Appeal Court Judge from Ghana, and then General Secretary. So we were the Officers of the World Council for eight years, and that would be meeting in Geneva about four or five times a year at least. And went through a whole restructuring of the Council and I chaired a group that did a whole evaluation of their program. But again, an incredible experience! The places I went, like Albania and Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and Lebanon. I would *never* have gone to places like that.

JL: And so maybe this is a good time for this question, because it sounds to me like wherever you have gone in your service of the church you have been welcomed, and I have my own personal wonderings if your curiosity and desire to learn might contribute to a sense of welcome, but my question is: Certainly in the World Council of Churches, and you're on the executive with these two men for whom perhaps seeing a woman in leadership might be refreshing or challenging to them, but do you ever remember a time when gender equality really got thrown up in your face in your service to the church? 41:28

MB: You know, I don't.

JL That's incredible.

MB: I don't.

JL: Wow.

MB: Yeah. Yeah, in fact, as much as the Armenian ... I mean, he's a Patriarch in his church, but you know, there was a respect. There was a respect because he knew what I could do, and I could do some things he didn't know how to do. And it was at a period when the World Council and the Orthodox were not getting along, and the Orthodox were insisting that all decisions of the Council had to be made by consensus. So we brought a woman from Australia who had done it with the Uniting Church in Australia and gave us training. The

Moderator would not take the training, and at the Assembly in Port Allegra in 2006 we had to make all our decisions by consensus. 750 people from 125 countries and 365 churches, and you're trying to make decisions by consensus. And we did it! And we did it. And pretty much I moderated all those sessions, and we had a great process. We were going to share the moderating, and when it would be Aram's turn he'd say, "You do it". And I was glad to do it, because I knew I'd do it better. Because, again, it was process. It was process and it was [about] really staying alert. I'd keep lists and I'd have all the continents written on a paper, and I'd make sure, when I looked at a microphone, to see "Is it a man or a woman? Are they from Africa or Asia?" and make sure that youth got heard and women got heard and that it wasn't just Bishops. And if there was a row of Bishops at a mike and there was a woman at the back, I'd say for the woman to come to the front. And it worked and people didn't revolt.

JL: I can imagine they would think "Oh, well that's fair".

MB: Yeah [chuckles]. So that was probably the last thing I really did in any significant way in the church, but it was a great way to go. But I honestly cannot remember not being treated decently. I mean, where I wasn't treated decently was in nursing. Oh, doctors, when I was a student nurse, it was like the army. I would be shouted at and ... oh, yeah. But in the church, I think I can honestly say that I never felt discriminated against because I was a woman. What I used to worry about was my lack of formal education. Would somebody say, "You can't have that job because you don't have a degree."

JL: And no one ever did.

MB: St. Stephen's and VST gave me DDs. I'm sure they felt better to have a Moderator who could put something after her name, because otherwise there was nothing! [Laughter]

[Laughter].

JL: And my last question around gender pieces, is earlier on you mentioned that at the time there was a girth of women, and so while it was in that time, when you were in the present moment of that time, did you notice that or is it only in looking back that you think, "Oh, I was the only one".

MB: Oh, I certainly noticed it at Theology and Faith. In particular because all of these men, I mean, they all had PhDs or DMin's or *something* and they were all ordained—there were no lay men on that Theology and Faith Committee—and so they put two lay women on. And I know Jean and I, we just looked at each other and we said, "Well you know our role will be when they get talking and we can't understand it, we tell them to stop. And let's make sure this is something we can all participate in."

JL: And were you nervous about doing that? Were you nervous the first time you

said “Okay, folks, you’re on a train way over here”?

MB: Well, not particularly. I think we thought, “We’re here for a reason. They put us here for a reason.” They could have chosen somebody different, although there were not a lot of ordained women at the time and I don’t know if there were any university theological school female professors at the time; that would have been ’78, there wouldn’t have been many if there were. Eventually Donna Runnalls ended up on there. But she’s the first woman professor that I remember being on the Committee.

JL: I have a few questions left and I am also aware of time, but I think we’ll be able to fit it all in. So, I know I’m going to miss some out, but I’m going to read from the biographical sheet you submitted to go along with the audio and the transcript. So dates and titles won’t get left out because whoever wants to see it can see the printed copy. But I’ll just read through a few of them and then I’m thinking that maybe—I mean we’ve talked about a lot of them and we’ve talked about your role in them—but maybe there are three of the many that you can think of as particularly inspiring something in your own faith or challenging you to the system of the church, or something that stood out. Maybe three of them that were elemental to change either in you or the church.

49:57

So just a brief listing: Conference involvement including Conference Executive and Conference President and all of the children’s work through Conference; General Council you were a commissioner nine times; Chaired the Sessional Committee No. 8; Moderator in ’94 and you were the first Moderator born in BC and the first Moderator to hold a three-year term; you also sat on seven other committees in General Council: Division of Mission in Canada Executive, Theology and Faith Committee, Lay Ministry Committee, Inter-church and Interfaith Committee chair, GC Executive, Living Into Right Relations Task Group, Moderator’s Advisory Committee and all of your work in Naramata and associations including the Canadian Council of Churches, the World Council on Exec. and as delegate, the VST Board, UCC Foundation and even being on the UCC Observer board.

So of all of that that has been said and not said, might there be one, two, or three where there was a particular inspiration or challenge that dropped a penny into the core of your life and shifted the rest of the course personally or professionally?

MB: Oh, the biggest probably was: elected Moderator in the summer ’94 and in December comes the word about Arthur Plint and Port Alberni Residential School. And I just couldn’t believe it. And I think I had hoped, in my term as Moderator, that I was well aware that the church was in difficulty and that congregations were in denial and I had worked with enough congregations with Bud Phillips here to know the kind of thing that needed to happen. And they needed to look at their context, they needed to get deeper theologically about why they were there at all; they weren’t just there to have coffee hour. And I had hoped that that would be the focus of my time as Moderator. And it was just totally absorbed by the Residential Schools. And it was just so sickening

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and difficult, because there was total fear in the national church that we were going to be bankrupted, and at first they thought there was an insurance coverage and spent a lot time and energy trying to uncover that. The insurance company and gone out of business so they were never able to find that. And then there were people saying, "We can't just accept full responsibility for this because the Federal Government will be off the hook. So we've got to hang in there and that means we have to defend ourselves in court." And that was the most *horrible* period. And thank goodness there were people like Susan Lindenberger and others here that when those trials were going on here they were hosting lunches for the family of the survivors. It was just terrible.

So when I finished my term I had hoped that there would be an apology at the '97 General Council, but they were still anxious about making an apology so it was a year later that Bill Phipps was able to make the Apology. The Executive—a group of them went to Port Alberni and came back and said, "We have to apologize." And I'd always wished it might have happened during my term, but it didn't. People weren't ready. When I talked about Residential Schools east of the Manitoba/Ontario border, people just said "That's nothing to do with us. We didn't have any of those schools. They were all out West." And they were, except I think there was one in Elgin in the late 1800s, but they *were* in the West.

JL: And except that we're a national church.

MB: Oh, yes. So then I became part of this "Right Relations" and I would attend—I don't know if you know about the ADR and the IAP processes, but for people who were abused in some way—physically or sexually abused—they could apply for financial help, and sometimes even for retraining for jobs and so on. And they would meet with an Adjudicator and there would be representatives of Canada there, and if they asked for it, someone from the church would go. And so I would go to some of those and just hear the stories and be able to apologize. And you had to apologize in a way that said, "I am really, deeply sorry for any harm that you suffered while in one of our schools." And for every one of those people, it was either a handshake or a hug. It was so beautiful. And it was hard.

It's something I still care about. I started a group in Penticton to relate to the Penticton Band, and then more recently started a group in Naramata where there's about 20 of us who all read the TRC Report and some of them today are marching because of it being Anti-Racism day. And so there's a march there. So that probably was the most painful. Just really, really hard to accept that the church that I'd loved—and to sit in those Healing Circles and hear the stories, and I'm thinking, "You know, when I'm having the kids singing 'Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world', these kids are being abused." It was terrible.

Another thing that was important was that—it was Susan Lindenberger's initiative, I think, that brought together people who had worked in the Schools, and we had a weekend—we had actually four days—together with people who

had worked in the Schools, and Alvin Dixon was there, and an Aboriginal woman who had worked in Norway House, and Charlotte Sullivan, were there. It was an amazing time, to hear those people's stories and what they had hoped to do. And at the end there were some that were deeply remorseful, saying, "The system was so flawed and why didn't we see it, we thought we were helping," and others who said, "It was the best thing that could have happened for those children. They would have had no education if they hadn't been to the Schools, and we treated them well." And they left on the same spectrum. So the stuff around the Indigenous Ministries is still big for me.

JL: Do you still listen to and participate in ... ?

MB: Well, if I have a chance. But the IAPs are all done now, they're all finished. The last two or three years there were fewer and fewer requests to have church people at them, but I don't know why. It was healing for me. I have no idea if it helped them, but it certainly was healing for me.

JL: I wonder if that had anything to do with the fact that the later ones would be happening after the apology.

MB: Well, they all happened after ... well, not after the government apology, but ...

JL: But the church one, yeah.

MB: Yeah, the church one. I think those were the tender ones, and certainly I think learning—as much as I would think, "We can get this organized, we can do this,"—realizing that sometimes you can't. And you need to also step back and depend on God's grace. You can't do it all. And I don't think God ever expected that we would, but sometimes we'd be thinking, "There's a way to do that. If we could just get the resources and get the right people together, it will all happen." And sometimes it did, and sometimes it didn't. So the heartbreak over Naramata Centre, that's really ... to live there and walk through the grounds, with things closed up. I mean I have some hope, and the Board is doing an amazing job, but it will never be what it was.

1:00:18

At Greg and Lori's, they had a hookup with their kids (video), all four boys, and every one of them talked about how important Naramata was to them. Every one of them. The Centre in particular, and just all being able to come to our place, and we'd have all the cousins there at the same time. And so the Centre, if it meant that [much] to those kids, you know how much it meant to hundreds and hundreds of them.

JL: It would have formed thousands of children.

MB: So it's hard watching churches close, and wondering. I'm still a Pastoral Charge Supervisor for places close to me where they don't have a minister and probably never will, and I just so wish that we had more emphasis on lay education so that lay people could do the study groups and could lead the

worship and do more, but the reality is that in some of the places people are so elderly now that they want to be cared for.

JL: And they've devoted lots of time to the church.

MB: Yeah, they have. And they deserve something. So it's not like I've got answers for it, but I think we need to deepen the faith that's there. Sometimes when you ask people, "What's really important to you about your church?" it's the coffee hour! It's around belonging. Belonging is really big. But going out and being significant in the community—when you say, "What are you known for in your community?" some of them have a hard time saying anything.

JL: And so if you were to have a hope for the future of the church, might that be it? That people's faith is so imbedded that they then go and share that sense of belonging? 1:03:26

MB: Yeah, that they would share the sense of belonging and that they would want to be involved in the community. I mean, this TRC group that we've got going, there's three of us from the church. The rest are from the community.

JL: That's great.

MB: It is great, yeah.

JL: It's great community involvement, but you wish there's more from the church in it, too.

MB: Yeah, and we've been fortunate in our congregation. It's a shared Anglican-United and I've been leading a study group there for quite a few years and we might have eighteen at church and we've had sixteen in the study group, four of whom don't go to the church, but they come to the group. So that core has a much more robust faith development and they love Biblical stuff, and I would wish that for everybody.

JL: When you know you have the freedom to wrestle with it, it's a lot more exciting to study Biblical stuff. When you perceive that you're going to have to adopt a certain belief about it then you don't want to go in.

MB: It's the wrestling with it that's been so rich, and people telling their stories of "How I once saw that story, and how I see it now." So that's still pretty exciting, to be doing that.

JL: So I have two last questions for you, Marion. If you were to do it all again, is there anything that you would change or that you would want to have seen differently? 1:05:12

MB: No. It's a miracle to me that any of it ever happened. It was interesting, when you asked the question about did I ever aspire to anything: never. And the

Moderator thing, and people started not long after '88, and I said, "Absolutely not, because I am so associated with that now, it can't be that." And so after '92 it started again and it was coming from so many places that I thought, "All I have to do is agree to being nominated and then I don't have to do anything."

JL: Yeah, God will take care of it!

MB: Exactly. And there's a great freedom in that. Once you say, "Ok, I'm willing to be nominated," all I had to do is write a page and nothing else. Then you just wait and if you get asked to do it you assume that people are entrusting something to you. Then you get on with it.

JL: I have to say, having the opportunity to listen to you live and speak with you about all this really reinforces for me the truth in answering a call, and being in service to God. My observation is that you have chosen to just say 'yes' until a 'no' is presented, and to follow the wisdom and the discernment of others along with yourself in service to a greater picture. And that's quite inspirational to me and hopefully to everyone who will listen because we live in a time when we're encouraged to pursue to what it is we want to achieve to make ourselves happy. And you're certainly a model of listening for the voice of God in your own heart and in the reflections of others and if we could all live that way I think we could all move forward a lot faster.

MB: Well, the only reason I could do it, too, is because of the kind of husband I had. For almost 64 years now. Jack was so supportive. There were certainly times when it was "Well, I've got to go to a meeting," or "I'm off here or there", but he was just totally supportive.

JL: That's wonderful. Good, good. Is there anything, in all we've covered, is there anything we've missed out on? Anything that's burning in you that we haven't talked about?

MB: I don't think so. Maybe because of that service on Saturday for Anne Searcy, there were so many people there that were part of my history as well as Anne's because we did that work together in the '60s and '70s, and then to see people like Jen Cunnings and Pamela and others that are so committed to that Children's Ministry. It really matters. And it was kind of like your life passing in front of you. You'd meet one more person, and, "Oh my goodness! I remember when..."

[Laughter]

MB: I mean this church is full of marvelous, marvelous people.

JL: That's great. Good, good! Well, our official ending button...

On behalf of the United Church I do want to offer a huge gratitude to you. not only for taking this time and having your voice recorded for people after us to hear, but also for all of the work you've done for the church and the ways in which you have sustained it and helped it to grow and inspired other people through it. So on behalf of everyone who will be hearing this, thank you so much for your time and your dedication.

MB: Thank you.

JL: So ends the interview.