

**Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**

**Oral History Interview**

Interviewee: Clancy Teslenko

Interviewer: Dave Werlin

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Index: New Brunswick - childhood activism - restaurant work – racism – hospital unit clerk – Canadian Union of Public Employees – CUPE Local 8 – women’s issues – chief shop steward – Elaine Husband – health care cuts – NDP Candidate – Ralph Klein – private health care

*Q: Tell me about your background. Where does an activist like you come from?*

CT: I was born in Chatham, New Brunswick. You'll see as my history goes, it's no longer Chatham, New Brunswick, but it's now Miramichi, New Brunswick. They merged a bunch of little towns into a big city. I have five brothers and two sisters. My mother was an RNA, and she worked nightshift. My father, in his early years, worked about, so he was gone a lot of the time. Then he eventually got a government job working driving snow plows and such, as well as a job with the postal workers; he was the mail carrier in our town.

My grandfather was a union organizer. I remember talking to my grandmother last year - she's 94 - and she was telling me in that 1912 or '13 there was her and two other women that got together in the basement of the hospital, and all signed their union cards together. They were afraid to be the first to sign, because the nuns would fire them, and she didn't want that to happen. It was quite an event for her at that time, and I remember talking to her about unions quite a bit.

Growing up in a family of eight, there were always battles, fun ones. Being the 3<sup>rd</sup> oldest you had to learn to comprise a bit, and to fight a bit too. You had to learn to stand up for yourself. A lot of what I learned, I learned through interaction with my family. So when I went to school, things didn't change much. I expected the same rules at home as I expected at school, and that was, everybody was treated fairly. I remember being sent to the principal's office in grade seven for standing up in class and saying, "Why is it these three people always get to do the extra things, and nobody else does?" The teacher didn't like what I had to say, and promptly sent me off to the principal's office. Back then, going to the principal's office meant you got the strap. But I sat down and told him what I said and why I said it. He understood and said, "Well you just don't do it in class ever again." I didn't get the strap, but the next time there was a special event, three other people got to do it. So that was really good. So everybody got a chance to do extracurricular stuff instead of just the favorite in the class.

I thought to myself that this sort of works, and so that's how I started standing up for other people, and things progressed from there. Then when I went to high school, I couldn't figure out why people on the west end, which was the rich end of town, had a bus, and the people on the east end where I lived didn't have a bus. So I took my friend Martha and went into the principal's office and said, "We want a bus." He argued that he had no control over that, that I would have to go to the superintendent, Mr. Sweeney. I think he was an MP back there now. We went to see him and he said that we couldn't have a bus unless we lived more than 1.5 miles away from the school - and I told him that we did. I was 17 years old. I had no idea about distance or anything else. We all jumped in his car and drove down to the old school and up to the new school, and sure enough it was 1.5 miles, and we got our bus. Sometimes it just takes a little action to get what you want; sometimes a little bluffing - but in this case it worked. I learned at an early age that if you want something done you have to take the bull by the horns and go and do it.

*Q: Were your parents active unionists?*

CT: My father was active in the union, but I'm not sure which roles he played. I do remember lots of discussion, thought, when the two unions were merging. I know that there was a lot of controversy and talk at the house at that time, so I know he was active then. But I don't know whether he was a shop steward or on the executive or anything.

*Q: So you'd finished high school, and were not ready for the world of work?*

CT: I had been sort of been working all along. I had a paper route from the time that I was about 9 years old, and delivered papers all over Chatham. I was up at 5 o'clock every morning and got my papers out, and would run into the teachers on their way to school. I'd be out by the packing shed doing my paper route. From there I did a lot of babysitting. That's how we made or 10 cents an hour back then, which was really good. Then when I was in grade 10 I decided I could get a job in the local restaurant, a Chinese restaurant. I went in and asked if he had any jobs. When he asked if I had any experience, I explained that, well, I set the table at home and I have 5 brothers and 2 sisters and 2 parents, and I have to serve the food there. He said, okay, we'll give you a try. So I started working there, and worked there on weekends right through grade 10, 11 and 12, until I went to university. It was quite an interesting experience. You have to remember that my town was small and that everybody was white. You were either Catholic, Protestant, French or English. That was it. Officially, there was no other cultures than that, so this was my first experience with somebody that wasn't white.

*Q: How did the community view this person?*

CT: You'd hear the same old lines - I even hate to repeat them: "We're going to the Chink's", stuff like that. It was constant; people were just blatant about it. They'd walk into the restaurant and wouldn't think twice about making racist comments. They didn't realize who these people were. That in itself was a challenge. It was quite interesting, because their son was the same age as I was. We were both going to school together when we were both working there, he ended up having to quit school, which just devastated him, to work in the business. He was a smart man, and I know that really hurt him. Then I remember he drove me home from work one night. He was so upset because he was having to go to China to get a bride. He didn't want to do this; he was absolutely terrified. I remember telling him that things will be fine, everybody has to do things for

their family. I had no idea about their culture, but this was a learning process for me too. When he came back, he brought his bride back, and everything worked out fine. They lived upstairs, had their children, and ran the business. Then eventually it ended up closing down, and I have no idea where they moved to. I actually moved out here to Alberta in 1980. At times I'd go back to New Brunswick and speak to the other children. At that time they were young adults, and were going to university. The only one that didn't get to do anything was Gordon, because he was the eldest and he had to take over the responsibility of the family. That was hard on him.

*CT: After this time, was there any hint that you were becoming political?*

CT: No, actually at that time, I was 16 or 17 years old, and I was just interested in working and meeting boys, all the typical things. But where I worked weekends, I really didn't have a lot of opportunity to get into any trouble. So I guess that was a good thing - and I worked until 2 or 3 in the morning.

*Q: What do you remember about the working conditions in that restaurant?*

CT: I remember my first paycheck was cash, and I was making \$1.65 an hour, which I was really thrilled about. And I got tips on top of that. To me it was great, considering that I grew up in a family of eight and there wasn't always a lot of money around. So even making that type of wage back then - well, it was my money. I could help out where I could and took some of the burden off my parents, and was able to do what I wanted to do. Saved up some money to go to university, and applied, and got it. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at university. I actually thought about being a nun. I studied theology, but I only went the one year. I kind of changed my mind about being a nun when I was there, - we'll leave that story untold. Then I thought maybe I'd be a teacher, but when I finished my first year, there were 320 graduates in the province with their BA or B.Ed, and there were only three job openings in the largest school district in the province. So I thought that I wasn't going to be able to do what I want to do.

*Q: Were you involved in student politics?*

I actually started getting involved politically when I went to university. I got involved with the students union and participated in my first overnight sit-in in at the government buildings in New Brunswick. We're talking about 1975 or '76, and it was rather interesting. The government was going to raise the tuitions, and with New Brunswick being quite a poor province, that was a problem in itself. Most of us were just barely getting by; if we were lucky we'd get a couple of scholarships or something like that. I was fortunate because I was able to get a couple of scholarships, and that certainly helped out a lot. To me it was overwhelming just being caught up in this type of involvement and the power that you could see that resulted from people getting together and doing what they wanted to do. We actually slept in the legislative buildings overnight; it was like an occupation. It was invigorating, and I needed that stimulus in my life, to give me some focus. I had all these ideas and thoughts, and didn't know where to go and didn't know what to do with them.

So that was my first 'blood rush', if you like, of involvement in a political organization, and I really quite enjoyed it. However, when I left the university I kind of went back to, where I began in Chatham, and just worked in restaurant jobs. I got a job in a truck stop

for a while, and that turned out to be quite interesting, because I didn't have to hitchhike anymore. Any time I needed to go anywhere, I'd just get rides with one of the truckers. So that was always great. If they were coming through to the truck stop and I wanted to go to Moncton or Bathurst, I'd just find out who was going where, and meet up with them to get a drive there and back. So that was fine. I had a good relationship with everybody I worked with. I didn't have problems with any of my bosses, and was treated the same as everybody else; there was no real issues there.

*Q: Would you give a general description of what restaurant work is like?*

CT: When I look at my first job in the Chinese restaurant, I was 16 years old, and was young and pretty. You can imagine some of the stuff you put up with from some of the people who come in. Service ran till 2 in the morning, when the bars were closing, and you'd be physically assaulted, with comments were constantly made to you. There was nothing you could do about it - unfortunately, in 1973, that's how things were. You just accepted it. Today, being the person I am, if I had to go back and work in a restaurant, things would be a little bit different - I'm quite sure they would be.

From there, even when I went to the truck stop, there were never any problems. Truckers were probably nicer than the people that came into the restaurants at night. They were working people, they were there to eat, to get their job done, and that was it. So there was a mutual respect, and there were never any problems. I then went to work in a restaurant that had a bar because I turned 18. There I had problems with the boss and I ended up taking him to task a bit. What was happening was that because it was a little upper class, they allowed Visas and Mastercards. I happened to notice on the slip one day that somebody had left a tip on their Mastercard, and the boss didn't give the tip to me. I started watching him, and he was taking the tips from all of the girls. So I approached him about that. Needless to say, I didn't work there much after that. It put a rift in the relationship but I don't think he got away with it much after that. He ended up selling the business, so I don't know if everybody ganged up after I left, or what happened, but the business went under after that. I guess he wasn't making as much profit, having to turn the tips back to the waitresses. So then I went to work in a bar, which I quite enjoyed. At that time, I was 19; you actually had to be 19 to work in a bar in New Brunswick. I could tell you about the time I dressed up as a man and went out drinking, because here were bars that women still weren't allowed in back then. That was quite interesting, a challenge; underage, and dressed as a man, and got into the bar. You had to have some fun.

*Q: In the bars that just allowed men in, did they have only men waiters?*

CT: I can't remember. Anyway, so then I went to work in a bar. We had this wonderful boss. He would come in all pumped and give us all this business about having to smile, to be happy, and to treat the customer right. I thought, okay, there's nothing wrong with that, because that's the type of person I am anyway. On the other hand, he'd come in the morning, and slam things around on some days and get really nasty. That was the first job I ever quit. I just went up and said to him, "You tell us this is how we have to act and this is how we have to be with a customer. You turn around and come in here and yell at us and scream at us and you throw things. I'm not going to put up with that. I've had it, I quit." Off I went. I just thought that I don't need to be treated like this. He has

expectations, so do I. They called me up and asked me to go back, and I did go back for a little while. We straightened things out and there were no more temper tantrums. Again, if you take the bull by the horn, something gets done. If I'd let it go, it just would've continued the way it was.

*Q: You were pretty much an oddity that way, weren't you? You didn't notice people around you taking things on, did you?*

CT: No, and interestingly enough, when I would do things like that, I'd always tell my mother. She and I have a pretty good relationship. I remember her telling me how odd I was, that I was such an oddball. I thought, well I guess so; I am different than other people, and that's fine. There was really nothing odd about it, or at least I didn't think there was. But it was challenging.

*Q: How did you get into hospital work?*

I ended up going to trade school. I don't recall applying for it, but in New Brunswick it was just something 'magic' that happened to people because of the high unemployment rate. All of a sudden one day I got a call saying I was going to take ward clerk training at St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, in St. Andrews Community College. So off I went to St. Andrews and studied to be a ward clerk. It was a six month course. They taught you medical terminology, and it was quite interesting, much different than the courses they offer now, because you had to work in the hospital, and you had to work in all the different areas. You had to work in the lab and you had to work in the kitchen and you had to work just a day in each place to familiarize yourself with the whole workings of a hospital. What they do now, they teach you medical terminology and that's it. Off you go, and there's no understanding of what everybody else does. So I thought that course gave me a really good basis for working with other people, because it gave me an understanding of what they did. You would see those that didn't take that type of course, they'd be yelling at people and there wouldn't be any understanding of why there might be difficulties and challenges. That was interesting. So I always try to learn about people that I'm working with. It makes things go a little smoother sometimes, if you have an understanding.

I got my ward clerk papers, and went back to New Brunswick and tried to get a job in a hospital. It wasn't easy in New Brunswick, because I wasn't bilingual. So I ended up going back to work at the bar, and I worked two days at the hospital in the whole year - July 1<sup>st</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup>, both stats; it was the only way I was going to get in. Back there, if you didn't know somebody, you didn't get hired. I guess my family didn't vote the right way or something, so I never got hired. That was challenging.

*Q: Do you come from a family of NDPers?*

CT: Actually no, I didn't. It was quite funny, I was probably out here in Alberta for about four or five years, before I had actually got started getting involved in politics. I remember one night phoning home and changing my voice a bit. My mother answered the phone and I said, "Yes, would Mr. Clancy be in please? This is Mrs. Broadbent calling." My mother got my father on the phone. I said, "Mr. Clancy, this is Mrs. Ed Broadbent calling. I understand that your province just went through a massive change politically, with Mr. Hatfield leaving and the new government coming in. Would you

mind telling me what conditions were like before and what conditions were like after?" He said, "Well ma'am, I'm really not the person you need to talk to. You should talk to my brother Frank." I said, "Mr. Clancy, I would sort of like to talk to you a bit about it. What can you tell me, what differences do you see?" "Well ma'am," he said, "You really should talk to my brother Frank - and so it went. So, weh he come back on the phone and gave me my uncle's number, I told him that it was me, his daughter Eileen. It was funny. But my uncle actually was involved in his labor council and involved in the NDP back home, and his wife ran for office a number of years ago.

*Q: What year did you come to Alberta and why?*

CT: I came to Alberta in February of 1980. I had a bunch of silver coins I sold to the local bootlegger back home, and hopped on a plane, and out I came. I'd been collecting silver, and my grandfather had given me some. Old coins before '67 were all silver. So I sold those and came out. Everybody was saying, you'll be back in three months, but now, it's 25 years later, and I'm still here. I came to Calgary, and my first job here was as a security guard. I worked at Gulf Canada Square, and interestingly enough, that was my first union involvement. A fellow by the name of Ron Brown, who was with CUPE, had come around and tried to organize us. We had all signed up to join the union. I really didn't know much about it, but the next thing I knew they were telling us we had to write down if the employer said anything bad about the union or made any threats to us. So, being the good little girl that I was, I wrote down everything that was said to me. We ended up going to the Labour Board on a certification issue and I remember having to read off my notes.

That was 25 years ago. I can only remember that I had written things like, "If you join the union, you're going to lose your job" - that type of thing. I guess it was important, because we actually did all lose our jobs. What happened is because the vote went through, the company closed its doors and moved out of Alberta. It was called Executive Security. They were based out of BC, and didn't want any union involvement in Alberta. They had the contracts at the Airport, and a number of the high rise towers here in the city. They wanted nothing to do with unions, so we all ended up losing our jobs. Fortunately for me, I got picked up by one of the companies and hired on as their private security, at a whole \$4.50 an hour. When I left New Brunswick I was making \$2.65 an hour. So I was making \$4.50 an hour here, with benefits after three months, which was really surprising, as well as all the overtime I wanted, like 16 hour days, 19 hour days if you wanted. It was just wonderful, when you were 22, except that you really didn't have a choice in the matter,- you had to work it, because people wouldn't show up, and you'd be at the worksite, you'd be stuck.

I think that in 1980 there were still lots of jobs around. So getting people and keeping them was a challenge. I guess that made things a little better for us; we even got a raise to \$4.75 an hour at one point. I came out in February and loved the weather. I couldn't believe I was wearing short sleeves and no coat in February. I guess a big Chinook had blown in just after I arrived. I don't know if that was an omen or not, but I actually tried to get on at the hospital. I ran into a girlfriend that I'd gone to trade school with. She told me that I had to take a six week course out here to get on in the hospital as a Unit Clerk. I thought that I couldn't really afford to do that on \$4.50 an hour, so I can't go back to school. I was working security, and then I got a second job working as a cleaning lady. I

worked as a cleaning lady from 5 in the evening until 10 at night, and then I worked as a security guard from 11 at night till 7 in the morning. So there was really no time for school. I did that for about three or four months, and finally, I don't know where I found time, but I ended up down at the Calgary General Hospital applying for a job. I decided to take a chance anyway, even though I was told I needed another six week course. When I walked in the door they asked me, where do you want to work? Apparently the six week course they offered here was a little lower than the six month course I'd taken in New Brunswick, so I really didn't have to take the other course. I actually started working in emergency immediately.

That was December of 1980. I started working there, and I think I was making \$8 an hour. That shows what a difference there is between non-union and going into a union job. Of course, at that point, I hadn't even made the association that one was union and the other one wasn't union; I just hadn't had a lot of thoughts about it. Those came later. It wasn't much later, however. There was a woman on the floor, Alice Spencer, and she was our shop steward. She would come around and tell us about the Union. In those days, you could sit at the desk and smoke in the hospital. She signed me up, my first union card. I'd started in emergency but ended up going to a floor called E8, a medical teaching unit. You had all the residents and medical students there. It was quite challenging. I remember her signing me up. I never really thought much about it after that, until one day we had this patient who wasn't very nice; he was actually quite abusive. I got to a point where (I have a bit of an Irish temper) I said to him, "Goddam you, why don't you grow up?"

Then I realized that this guy was here because he was sick, and I shouldn't have done that. So I went and told my boss what I had done, which was my first mistake. I told him that this is what happened, and I realize I shouldn't have done it, but I just wanted to let you know. The next thing I know, I was being suspended, and I wanted to know why am I being suspended. I was told that they have a progressive disciplinary action, and that if I do something wrong, then I need to be disciplined. I said, but why am I being disciplined - I'm the one that came and told you that I made a mistake. I recognized that I did something wrong. Isn't that what you're supposed to do? I just couldn't understand why I'm being disciplined. So I got my shop steward and filed a grievance.

After that, I started going to union meetings, because I'd never gone to one there before. The first one I went to, there was a fellow by the name of Joe Barbaro speaking. Joe used to work at the hospital, and he was a cook. He was so impressive; I remember sitting there listening to him talk and thinking, oh my God, he's making so much sense. It was his speech that made me want to come back and learn more about it. Then, as I went to union meetings, I would bring up points at union meetings and people would say, hmm. (of course I've always been a shy, quiet person, never spoke out of turn!) So the next thing you know, I was elected as Vice President; right off the floor at Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 8. At that time it had about 3,200 members, and looked after everybody at the General Hospital, which at that time was quite massive. As well, it had a number of Care West facilities; for example, George Boyak, Fanning and Glenmore Park. As well, it had three other nursing homes that were run by Carl Bond, who was an interesting character in himself. (As a matter of fact, Carl Bond hit Dave Werlin with his cane at the Labour Board meeting one time, if I remember correctly.)

We had some colorful characters back then. There was Glenmore Park Nursing Home, Mayfair, Glenmorgan, and a few others. It was an interesting and big organization to get involved in. Eventually I started getting involved in everything having to do with the union; it was a whole new world for me. Women's rights, what's that? If you want something, you go get it. I remember going to my first National CUPE Convention, when somebody brought up an issue on equality for women and standing up for women's rights. I got up and spoke against it. I couldn't understand why we needed this- I had no idea, because being aggressive as I was, there wasn't much that ever stood in my way. I never really thought about how other women were being affected. There was a woman by the name of Lynne Godin who lived here in Calgary; she worked at the Holy Cross Hospital. She came and talked to me after that and said, "Clancy, you and I are going to sit down when we get back to Calgary, and I'm going to show you some of the issues and talk to you about some of the problems." And she actually did just that. She took the time with me after, and pointed out some of the history of the woman's struggle, what had been going on, and why there was need for equality programs and affirmative action and things of that nature. It was like a whole new world to me, as this was not something that I had ever thought about before, and it was stimulating. CUPE had a lot of good courses to offer, and I took advantage of as many as I could. I loved to learn, and ended up being an occasional instructor for CUPE. I quite enjoyed that role too; I guess I'm a sort of unfulfilled 'wannabe teacher' going back to my days in university. This experience taught me a lot of personal strengths, and when I look at where I was before I got involved in the union, which was a lot of drinking and self abuse, to where there was something important for me to do, which actually kind of turned my life around. You have a choice: you can continue down this road, or you can be responsible and go down this road. I chose the union road, which was probably a good thing for me.

*Q: Do you remember any other specific incidents or events in those early years of union involvement?*

CT: Some of the things I remember are probably not good things. I don't know if you want them on tape, but I'm going to say them anyway. I remember going to conventions, and I remember the men at those conventions, and I can tell you that some of the comments they made about women were not useful. They'd say things like, "This one's easy, that one's easy, we'll have fun with her." I got upset, really upset. At that point I'd made a decision in my life, that being involved in the union was important, and to hear this stuff was very hurtful. I made a pact with myself that, if I got involved in this, then I would have to make a separation. I decided I was going to get involved in it and be serious, so I took these men to task and advised them that they were talking about 'union sisters' here. If this is how they're going to talk about them, and want me along for the ride, I wasn't going to continue coming with you if this is how you're going to be.

Well some of the boys didn't like it very much. I remember one guy used to talk about help this or that woman, because she had big breasts. He was the President of the Local at the time, and these were some of the things that we had to deal with. I remember another one making a comment about a black woman who was on our executive saying, "Oh ya, it's good to have the soots around." They were talking about women who were active in their union, who had overcome their own barriers, and this is how they were being treated by the executive, the leadership of the Local at that time. I wasn't a happy camper at all,

and decided to do something about it - I was going to run for a position, the chief shop steward, which was held by a man who I felt was not doing a good job. He wasn't making sexist or racist comments or anything of that nature, because he wasn't one of those guys. But there were just other areas in which he wasn't doing well. I actually got elected by the women into that position, in spite of the fact that he ran again. I felt that being in that position I could make some changes. People were going to get treated the way they deserved to be treated, not because of the color of their skin or because they had big breasts. It wasn't going to be the 'boys at the top' making the decisions anymore; it was going to be me as chief shop steward, as to how grievances were going to be handled. That made a big difference.

*Q: Did it really make a difference? Did you notice that people's behavior started changing?*

CT: The boys at the top hated me more than ever, which was fine; I learned to handle that. There were also some deliberate attempts at sabotaging me, like one incident, where one of them actually set me up. I was floored. I went back to him afterwards, right into the butcher shop, and asked, "How dare you? You did this, you told me what to say in this meeting. I said it, and you turned and stabbed me in the back." He did it deliberately, because they felt that they had to protect themselves.

However, I feel that I actually had a positive effect on the world that I was working in. What I saw was a lot more women coming to union meetings. We made some changes in the bylaws, such as getting subsidies for childcare, for people to attend union meetings. There were all kinds of little changes that made it more accessible for women to get involved in the union. Initially when all of this started, I wasn't married and I didn't have children. But, I remember going to a CUPE convention in Lethbridge a couple of years later, because by that time I was married and I had a child. That would've been 1989, 1990. I remember there was a resolution that I had written and put forward to CUPE provincial convention, on childcare, about providing subsidies for childcare. I not only did that; I also had resolutions on health and safety, on government issues, political issues, everything. I wasn't focused on women's rights. When this resolution came up, I had gone up to the mike and spoke on it. As I was leaving the mike, I was devastated. One of the brothers turned to me and said, "Why don't you stay home with your kids?"

I was absolutely floored that he would say that to me, at that that point in 1990. Unions had been talking about equal rights, there'd been acceptance on the principles at the National. I was floored and didn't know how to handle it. I had just had a corneal transplant done at that time, and I wasn't allowed to cry, which was challenging. That's how much it hurt me, I was devastated. I remember catching my breath, going to the back of the hall, and sitting down and thinking, "Okay, I can't cry, because I'd just had my surgery and I had to try to control the tears." The I thought, "I'm not going to put up with this." So I went back in and I went to the mike and I said that I couldn't believe what had just happened on this floor, and from there, a rally for support started. After I got off the mike, I don't know how many brothers and sisters got up and condemned what had happened. This had to happen. Even the president of the Local of the guy who made the comment came and spoke to me. I hadn't used his name on the floor, because I didn't think it was necessary, he knew who he was. It eventually got figured out, however,

because somebody saw him come and speak to me right after. The president of his local dealt with that member, who later came and apologized.

For that to happen was a big thing; we actually ended up being quite good friends after that. It was also much like what I had done to Lynne Godin on the resolution of standing up for women's rights. It was kind of like I belittled what she had done without knowing it. Lynne and I actually ended up being good friends after that. Lynne and I actually had tried to merge her local and my local in AUPE, Foothills Hospital, back in the early '80s, into one Local. We saw what was happening and tried to facilitate meetings through the labor council to get this moving. It unfortunately fell through, and then ended up being forced on us by the government a number of years later. But this was something I thought was important back in the '80s, and it didn't happen.

*Q:* How long did you stay at the General? Describe what it was like working in health care at that time.

*CT:* I was at the General for 18 years - until they blew it up. I started working there in December of '80, and it wasn't bad; in fact, working in health care back then was pretty good. There were lots of nurses on the floor, and patients were being looked after. There was enough staff to get the work done, and you didn't go home feeling totally exhausted at the end of each day. Then things started to change slightly. They started hiring more administrators and cutting back on staff; I guess that two staff salaries for every administrator seemed to be the ratio at the time. Things got progressively worse, and we started seeing cutbacks in the nursing staff, which meant that things started changing as far as patient care went too. Patients were being discharged from the hospitals earlier. There were rumblings about governments cutting services, starting back in '88, if I'm not mistaken.

They were intending to de-insure services, and there was a surge then of people concerned about the direction that the government was taking with healthcare. Organizations were set up throughout the province. I remember one woman, Elaine Husband who was involved with the NDP and city council and healthcare. I remember meeting her. I still see her now, and tell her she was my mentor. She was the woman that actually got me involved. There were actually two really memorable women in my life – Jean Ross was one and Elaine Husband was the other; both phenomenal women, leaders whether they knew it or not. You couldn't help but absorb and learn from them, which was really good, because some of the role models in my local were not people you actually wanted to learn from, relating to some of the comments I made earlier. I guess I learned from these women that everybody needs to be treated with dignity and respect, and everybody is equal. If you're going to stand up, you damn well better be prepared to stand up and be ready to be knocked down.

*Q:* Talk about the huge cutbacks in provincial funding that started in 1993, and the effect they had on working conditions and patient care..

As things started changing in health care, I started getting politically a little more active, certainly within the Local. I ended up becoming President at one point in time, and held the position for a little while, I don't remember how long. We went through a number of battles during that time, such as in 1993, just 12 years ago, when they were cutting \$93 million out of the healthcare budget.

Ralph Klein had just become premier at that point. There was a provincial election coming and I wondered what I should do. I knew that they were heading towards privatization, because I had read enough on healthcare, and seen enough studies that were done, and I knew exactly where they were going. I thought, I can sit back and I can keep my mouth shut, or I can do something about it. So I took the bull by the horns and ran against Klein in Calgary Elbow in 1993 for the NDP. They didn't have a candidate at that time. I knew I was a one issue person, because I knew nothing about such areas as education, and knew little about what was going on in the rest of the world - I only knew about what was happening to healthcare and where they were going with it. On that basis, I decided I would throw my hat in the ring.

That election was probably one of the best learning experiences in my life, because it showed me how much I didn't know. Running for public office, especially against the Premier, with the calls that came in and requests that came in on a number of different issues! All I can say is thank god I had a good campaign manager, who kept me abreast of everything that was going on. I would've failed miserably if it wasn't for that person. I had to debate Mr. Klein live which proved to be quite interesting. It was at a community centre. I didn't drive; I never even had a drivers license. So getting around was actually quite a challenge. I had a speech to write, and I'd really never done anything like this before. I have to interrupt here to tell you about my first attempt at public speaking; it was a complete failure - that was when I was with CUPE, when I had to give a report on something. I got up and I was shaking. The person before me was a fellow by the name of Ken Balkwill, who was very articulate and could talk about anything. I had to get up behind him, and I was shaking. I remember being there and looking up and saying, that's a hard act to follow. Everybody laughed, and I froze. I couldn't do anything after that, because I looked up and saw all these people. I had to hand the papers off to someone beside me. So I ended up taking a public speaking course with CUPE, taught by Royle Harris. It sort of gave me my wings from there.

So to go back to this speech, I started with things that I knew – healthcare - and that's all I can write about. My friend Elaine Husband happened along and helped me, so that by the end of the night I had a phenomenal speech. Elaine used to write for the Calgary Herald and stuff like that, so she was informed and knew how to set words. Anyway, we got to the hall and she wouldn't let me out of the car until I could read the speech perfectly, with all the accents in the right place. What a difference it made! There were parts of my speech in which I was booed, and there were parts where people applauded. But I got my points home. We ended up revealing a little scam that one of Klein's finance men had got into with some property out in Canmore, through the Treasury Branch. Through a numbered company, he got a golf course approved and didn't have to go through an environmental evaluation. So that was interesting. I lost the election, but the interesting thing about it was the number of doctors that came up, that had actually been at the debate, and said, “We're supporting you, we're going to be voting for you.” I was floored. The sad part about it was, the night before the election we had a union meeting. I was standing at the back of the hall, and as people were leaving, I remember one or two of them saying, “Well good luck tomorrow Clancy, but we're voting for Klein”. I was floored; they were going to vote for the man that was making the decisions that were going to cost them their jobs, and they were still going to go and vote for him. It was like, they couldn't make the connection, get the whole picture. Obviously, either I wasn't

doing a good enough job communicating it, or they didn't want to hear it. I thought I was doing a good job communicating it, but it just didn't seem to make a difference, and these were workers, union members making these comments. It was like, what do we do now? If we can't get our own members to see that this is going to cost them their jobs, it's scary.

*Q: Did it cost them their jobs?*

It did. The Klein Government ended up getting rid of all the hospital boards, and making regional health authorities, and putting in more administrators. Of course with more administrators, came more cutbacks, and we started seeing contracting out of housekeeping. As a first step, most of the housekeeping in the city was contracted out in all of the hospitals, because it was cheaper. Instead of paying people a decent wage, they could get a company that would bring people in for \$4.50 an hour - and it was still \$4.50 an hour 13 years later, because it was non-union. That's what I had been making when I started doing housekeeping in 1980.

*Q: What about patient care?*

CT: Patient care, in my opinion, deteriorated badly. For one, the nurses were run off their feet. They didn't have time to talk to patients anymore. Not long before, we would see nurses go in and take some time with the patient, explain things to them. Now it was a case of rushing in, giving them their meds, and rushing out to get to the next one. How are people going to get well in this environment? Where's the calmness, where's the chance for them to relax? Where's the chance for them to understand what's happening to them, to have that inner healing power? It wasn't there. It was rush in, rush out, rush in, rush out. Women were being discharged from hospital after six hours of having a baby. It was all so fast, so quick, everybody was ... It was one thing after another. You didn't have a chance. You would start one fight and they would hit you with something else. It was go, go, go. To be honest with you, I can't remember how many battles we fought from 1993 to 1997, because it was constant. It was a whirlwind of cuts, cuts, cuts; privatize, close, and finally blow up. It was just three hospitals in Calgary gone, bang, bang, bang.

They continued no matter what we did. We told the public about population growth, 3% a year the city was growing, and they're cutting back, they're eliminating three hospitals. The lineups were already there, the private hospitals were already starting. As a unit clerk, part of my job was to book appointments for people that were being discharged. You should just try and call some of the doctors that were working at the private clinic. Given the lineups from when a clinic opened, you could get in to see a doctor in maybe a month - that was the waiting list back before the privatization. You try and get in to see one of these orthopedic surgeons once the private hospital opened up, you were looking at 8 month waiting list. It was phenomenal. The practitioners were spending all their time at the private hospital, because they were getting paid more money.

*Q: Tell us about this private hospital.*

CT: It's called HRG. When they started closing the hospitals, they allowed a private clinic to open; it was run by doctors who basically did private contracts for Blue Cross, WCB, and private insurance claims. They all paid more money than the government to the doctors for their services, so the doctors were working both systems, the public and

they were working in the private. As a result, the waiting lists for patients who weren't insurance patients started growing longer and longer. Yet those on WCB, those with private insurance claims, were getting done faster. When I tried to argue this with people, the philosophy was, well they're on workers comp, and we have to get them done sooner because it's costing the employers money. So they became a priority, they got to jump the queue, because it was costing the employers money to have people off on workers compensation. It was like, well what about the other people who aren't on workers compensation, who want to get back and provide a living for their families. There was no thought given to these people – I believe that it was because they were getting paid more, that was the only reason. And yes it was having an impact on the employer. That's why a lot of this privatization was allowed, for employers to save money. It's got so many edges to it, it's scary. So we have see the "de-Klein" of the healthcare system.

Add to that the problems we encountered in negotiations because of all this. We had a number of things happen because of the cutbacks. There were threats of closure. Then, the employer broke off negotiations. They had a special issue at the General Hospital, in '94; said they were going to continue to operate if we would negotiate a rollback. I knew these people. Talked to them and said, we can either take a rollback, or we can fight. They asked me to, and I negotiated a rollback and the members ratified it.

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