

Frank Reaume
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FR: My name is Frank Reaume. Sorry. . . .

My name is Frank Reaume. I'm a caretaker for the Calgary Board of Education. I work at Glenbrook Elementary School. I've been there for 25 years, same school. What else can I say?

Q: What's your position with Friends of Medicare?

FR: With the Friends of Medicare I'm on the executive with the Calgary chapter of the Friends of Medicare. I'm on the board of the Edmonton Friends of Medicare board. I'm also for the union, for CUPE local 40, I'm the recording secretary.

Q: How long have you been doing that?

FR: Well over 20 years.

Q: How did you first get involved?

FR: It was something, after I heard the story about, oh God, what's his name, I'm a bugger with names. The guy who started in Saskatchewan. Tommy Douglas. After I heard his story and what he was doing and everything, I says, that sounds quite good to me. So I said, anything that had him in mind was good for me too. So I joined, I'd been in Calgary since 1980 and I lived in Edmonton five years prior to that. So I think we started 1980, '90.

Q: The Friends started in 1979. Were you Edmonton in '79?

FR: Yes I was, yes I was, ya. So I started, I was asked, I don't know who asked me, if I wanted to come and join them. I said, sure, I'd love to do that.

Q: What was the organization like back then?

FR: Well it was, I mean we all helped each other in any way we could and as often as we could. It was something that the majority of us who were in it, I couldn't tell you the names because I can't remember names. But anyways, the person who you know, who you know, wanted to get things rolling, and I can't remember his name either. But anyways, it was something that I thought would be good for not only us in Edmonton and then the whole province would benefit from this.

Q: What was happening around that time? What was in the air?

FR: What was in the air? There was something in the air. Um, I can't remember.

Q: Do you remember some of the things that you people did?

FR: Oh that we did? We had monthly meetings, as I remember. After I got transferred to Calgary I still went to the monthly meetings in Edmonton. I took a bus and went there and come back the same night.

Q: Was there a Friends of Medicare in Calgary when you arrived?

FR: No, there wasn't.

Q: So what happened?

FR: Oh okay. So we've only been together here in Calgary about 10 or 12 years. I'm just guessing, but it's close. The board in Edmonton thought it would be a good idea to have a chapter in Calgary, which we have now. It's called the Calgary Chapter of the Friends of Medicare.

Q: So you guys meet as a chapter.

FR: Ya, we meet once a month, and it's usually a day or two after the Edmonton board has its meeting. Then we can input some of the information that takes place at that meeting. I still, I don't go to the board meetings, because they have conference calls. It's easy to, I mean I just take notes down as things happen and then we have the Calgary chapter a day or two later, meeting.

Q: What sort of group have you brought together here in Calgary?

FR: Well we've got about 12 or 13 people. Ted Woynillowicz, he's our chair right now. The previous chair was Avalon [ALHI note: Avalon Roberts]... Okay. Judy Johnson, she used to be a former chair of our chapter too. She's a doctor, well not a medical doctor. [ALHI note: Dr. Judy Johnson is a psychologist]. Okay that's the one.

Q: What are some of the events you remember?

FR: Some of the events... Well there's a young fellow, well he's not quite as young now, his name was Ralph Klein. He tried, he tried hard, but he couldn't put it through. He was wanting to make humungous big changes in the provincial healthcare.

Q: Do you remember some of the things he did?

FR: Some of the things he did? Well ya. One was he blew up our only hospital downtown. I should mention here now that Calgary is the only city in North America with no downtown general hospital. It still is. The only city in North America.

Q: What reason did he give for blowing it up?

FR: Well I'm sure he had a lot of his friends who wanted to put up condos, and that's exactly what happened when they knocked the hospital down. There's condos there now. ... On the riverbank, ya, overlooking the Bow River.

Q: Do you remember what this organization was called and how it constituted itself, when you people got together over the blowing up?

FR: Well there was a group called the Friends of the Calgary General Hospital. Clint Moore, he was our chair for the majority of the time that I was with them. We had monthly meetings too. I'll never forget when that hospital blew up. I was standing on top of a highrise with my camera. I take pictures, I take thousands of pictures. But this was before digital cameras. I had a 36 roll of color film in my camera and I was just going click, click, click, click, until the whole thing. There was lots of smoke come from that. I still have copies of the, hmm, channel 7, they had cameras all over the place. I still got copies of all those. There's about six videos I have.

Q: You saved the videos?

FR: Yes.

Q: So you've taken lots of pictures over the years?

FR: Thousands.

Q: Like what sorts of things relating to Medicare?

FR: To Medicare? Well, the hospital. Let's see, I'm trying to think here in Calgary.

Q: Did you take any pictures of the signing of petitions?

FR: Oh I might have.

Q: Or rallies?

FR: Oh ya rallies, any time there was a rally. I took pictures of the rallies. Even they had a rally at the Foothills Hospital here not too long ago, within the past two or three months. I took a bunch of pictures there too, lots of them.

Q: Was Friends of Medicare back then just a union front?

FR: No, it was, actually it was the same thing as it is now. People are interested in what we do because let's face it, everybody grows older every single day. I'm almost 69 years old, so I've been a senior for a while. It's not something that will hurt anybody, being a Friend of Medicare. If people, because at meetings that we've had, I've noticed that the number of people who attend, I mean I'm talking about the big meetings, like an annual

general meeting or something like that. There's lots of it, more people at each and every one of them that I attend. Which is good.

Q: What are people worried about?

FR: What are they worried about? About having to pay too much for their Medicare. About not getting a lot of, not getting what they figure they should get from the government. And what else? Hmm. That covers just about the majority of everybody.

Q: What sort of man was Ralph Klein?

FR: What sort of man was he? He was very outspoken. He had no problem telling people where to go and how to get there. He worked for a, before he became mayor of Calgary he worked for a TV station as a reporter basically. So he knew his way around. But he, ...

Q: People have the view of Calgary that protest is out.

FR: If you think it's out, c'mon out and see what we do.

Q: What are some of the things you remember? Any rallies?

FR: One we went to was the office of, who was the health minister who had his office here in Calgary? It was a year or two ago. I can't remember his name. But he wasn't there, but he's got an office there. They decided to have a rally there. Well God I bet there was 300 people there easy. ... This was provincial, provincial health minister.

Q: Was it Ron Liepert?

FR: No.

Q: Maybe the guy before him.

FR: Or was it? Maybe it was. It could've been him, yes. In fact I know exactly where his office is now.

Q: So what does Friends of Medicare do to get a crowd like that out?

FR: Well they tell people to tell their friends and tell their friends and tell their own friends. It does help getting people out. Oh ya.

Q: What keeps you going?

FR: What keeps me going?

Q: Ya, with the Friends of Medicare.

FR: Well I appreciate everything that they've done in the past and everything that they're going to continue to do. It's for everybody's good, bottom line.

Q: What would you say to a young person about why it's important to preserve Medicare?

FR: Well because someday you, Joe Blow, whoever you are, you will be old and you will be in the same boat as I am right now. Really.

Q: Do you remember the laundry workers' strike?

FR: I do.

Q: It was at the General and the Foothills.

FR: Ya. The one that was at the General, it was the one building that was knocked down. I wonder why, ya. But I didn't have too much to do with that, but I do remember it though, happening.

Q: Have you ever needed medical care yourself of any serious kind?

FR: Well I have type II diabetes. I take lots of pills. There's no shortage of pills for me. But other than that.... But see, me still working at school as a caretaker is good for my health, because I probably walk around 15 to 20 kms a day easy. Walking is good for people with diabetes. Anyways.

Q: So you appreciate what happened when the Friends of Medicare rose up to try to stop the federal government from extending the patent period on pharmaceuticals.

FR: Ya, ya. They wanted to make it longer.

Q: And they succeeded.

FR: Ya, that was good. I couldn't ask for anything better.

Q: Remember the Generic Now campaign?

FR: Oh ya.

Q: Are the pills you take generic? Well you've got a health plan, so you wouldn't know.

FR: I think I know. I take, ya I think some of them are. I'm also on a what do you call it, I can't remember what I was going to say.

Q: What do you think we have to guard against next? What's down the pipe for Medicare?

FR: For Medicare. Uh, that's a good one, good question.

Q: Do you know about the private clinics here in town?

FR: Oh, do I know? ... Ya. There's lots of them in town. I think the reason there's lots of them in this town, Cow Town if you want to call it that, they're doing it for the majority of the people who have all kinds of money and don't know what to do with it. There's all kinds of them in town. Really. And I heard there's a big one on the far side on the same property as the Foothills Hospital just opening up too. You gotta ask Ted about that, he'll tell you all about that one. I think it's three stories high, or four.

Q: Are they going to do private surgery?

FR: That's what I understand, ya.

Q: But that goes against the Canada Health Act.

FR: I know. You're not telling me nothing new.

Q: Why is this government getting away with it?

FR: The provincial government you're talking about, ya. Why are they getting away with it? Because a lot of people don't want to make waves. That's the way it is, that's the way they figure the government wants it, so that's the way it's going to stay.

Q: What is it in your past that makes you into a person that makes waves?

FR: That's a good question. Well...

Q: Is there something in your family background?

FR: No, no. I mean, the diabetes that I got is hereditary, comes down from my mom and dad. I had six sisters. I have five sisters and four of them have diabetes too. They're all living in southern Ontario. But your question was about... Oh was that it?

Q: What is it about your past that makes you the person that you are?

FR: Well that's about all I can tell you about my past as far as healthcare goes.

Q: What kind of family do you come from? Was it a union family?

FR: Ya, my dad worked at the Ford Motor Company in Windsor for 25 years or so. He went to war in England and he came back, and they kept having babies. It's a French family. So we, then after I finished my high school I went to join up with the Canadian

Armed Forces. I served 20 years on the Canadian Armed Forces as a cook. Then I also served in the Middle East for the United Nations, two six-month tours in Egypt.

Q: Which years was that, roughly?

FR: That was '73 and again in '77.

Q: What they called the Suez Crisis?

FR: Oh ya, we were right next to the Suez Canal. Oh ya. You think it's hot in this country. I was a cook and I was cooking in a kitchen and it was 120 degrees outside the kitchen, plus the kitchen heat. But anyways, I enjoyed it. The guys were good.

Q: What did that experience teach you?

FR: Well it taught me that everybody is the same. We're all people and we have to treat each other as if we're all brothers and sisters.

[END]