

ALHI Road Show 2005

Clancy Teslenko

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

[Calgary]

CT: I was born in Chatham, New Brunswick. You'll see as my history goes, it's no longer Chatham, New Brunswick. 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 early years, worked the boats; so he was gone a lot of the time. Then he eventually got a government job working the garage driving snow plows and such. And later on a job with the postal workers--he was the first mail carrier in our town.

My grandfather was a union organizer. I remember talking to my grandmother last year. She's 94. She was telling me in 1912 or '13 there was her and two other women all 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. 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 was always battles, fun ones sometimes. Being the 3rd oldest you had to learn to compromise 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. I expected the

same rules at home as I expected at school, and that was, everybody was treated fairly. When that didn't happen, I remember being sent to the principal's office in grade 7 for standing up in class and saying, why is it these three people always get to do the extra things, and nobody else in the class does? The teacher didn't like what I had to say, and promptly sent me off to the principal's office. Back then, the principal's office meant you got the strap. But I sat down and told him why I said what I said. He understood and said, well you just don't do it in class ever again. 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 favourite in the class. I thought, hmm, this sorta works. So that's how I started standing up for other people, and things went on 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 said, I have no control over that. You 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, you can't have a bus unless it's 1.5 miles away from the school. I said, well it is. I was 17 years old. I had no idea about distance or anything else. He said, fine. 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 and we got our bus. Sometimes it just takes a little action to get what you want. Sometimes a little bluffing, but in this particular case it worked. I learned at an early age 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. I'm not sure which roles he actually held. But I do remember lots of discussion around 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 of that nature.

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

CT: I'd kind of been working all along. I had a paper route from when 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 actually did a lot of babysitting. That's how we made our 10 cents an hour back then, which was really good. Then, when I was in grade 10, I decided I could probably get a job. I went down to a local restaurant. It was a Chinese restaurant, and I went in and said, have you got any jobs? He said, do you have any experience? I said, 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, grade 10, 11 and 12, until I went to university. It was quite an interesting experience. You have to remember, my

town was a small little town. Everybody was white. You were either Catholic, Protestant, French, or English. That was it. There was no other cultures than that. So that was my first experience with somebody outside being white.

Q: How did the community view this person?

CT: You'd hear the same old lines, the same old, I even hate to use 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 actually 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, 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. Different times I'd go back, and I'd 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 is there any hint that you're becoming political?

CT: No, actually at that point in 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 till 2 or 3 in the morning.

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

CT: I remember my first paycheque was cash, and I was making \$1.65 an hour. I was thrilled; I really was. And I got tips on top of that. To me it was great, considering you 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, 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 in. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do when I went to university. I actually thought about being a nun. I studied theology, and I only went the one year. Kind of changed my mind about being a nun when I was there-- we'll leave that story untold. 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 BEd, and there were three

job openings in the largest school district in the province. I thought, why am I doing this? I'm not going to be able to do what I want to do. 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 the government buildings in New Brunswick.

Q: What year would that be?

CT: We're talking about 1975 or '76. It was rather interesting. The government were going to raise the tuitions. New Brunswick being quite a poor province, that was a problem in itself. Most of us weren't going to university, just barely getting by. If we were lucky we'd get a couple of scholarships and things like that. I was fortunate I was able to get a couple of scholarships to go, and that certainly helped out a lot. To me it was overwhelming just being caught up in the involvement and the power that you could see from people getting together and doing what they wanted to do. We actually slept in the parliament 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 would, of involvement in an organization. I really quite enjoyed it. But when I left the university I kind of went back to, when I went back to Chatham, I just worked in restaurant jobs. I got a job in a truck stop for a while. That turned out to be quite interesting, because I didn't have to hitchhike anymore. Any time I needed to go anywhere, I'd get rides with 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 and get a drive there and get a drive back. So that was fine. I had a good relationship with everybody I worked with. Didn't have problems with any of my bosses, was treated the same as everybody else. There was no real issues there.

Q: Can 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. I was young and I was pretty, and some of the stuff you put up with with some of the people that come in. It ran till 2 in the morning; the bars were closing. You'd be physically assaulted. Comments were constantly made to you. There was nothing you could do. But 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. Actually, I'm quite sure they would. 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 was never any problems there. I then went to work. I was 18; so I could work in a restaurant that had a bar. There I had problems with the boss. I ended up taking him to task a little 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. I'm not sure 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. There were bars that women still weren't allowed in back then. That was quite interesting. It was 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 men waiters?

CT: I don't know; I don't know. 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, you have to smile, you have to be happy, you have to treat the customer right. I thought, okay, nothing wrong with that. That's the type of person I am anyway. He'd come in in the morning, and he'd slam things around other days and get really nasty. That was the first job I ever quit. I just 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 said, I've had it, I quit. Off I went. I just thought, you know what-- 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 horns, 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. My mother and I have a pretty good relationship. I remember her telling me how odd I was: you're such an oddball, she'd say. 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 that was challenging. I ended up going to trade school. I don't recall applying for trade school. I don't know in New Brunswick whether it was just something magic that happened to people because of the unemployment rate, but 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, St. Andrews Community College. So off I went to St. Andrews Community College 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 kind of 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.

Q: So you got your ward clerk papers?

CT: I got my ward clerk papers, and went back to New Brunswick and tried to get a job in the hospital. But being New Brunswick, 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. It was July 1st and August 1st, 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 we 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 about four or five years. I had actually got started getting involved in politics. I remember one night

phoning home. I changed my voice a little bit. My mother answered the phone and I said, yes, would Mr. Clancy be in please? I said, this is Mrs. Broadbent calling. My mother ran and 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. I said, would you mind telling me what conditions were like before and what conditions were like after? He went, 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. I said, well Mr. Clancy, would you have his phone number? You could hear him on the phone in the background--Mabel, Mabel, what's Frank's number? He was yelling out to my mom. So he come back on the phone and gave me my uncle's number. I said, Mr. Clancy, one more thing. He said, yes, what's that? I said, I just wanted to let you know, it's me, your daughter Eileen. Jesus Christ, he said, I'll get you. It was funny. But my uncle actually was involved in his labour council and involved in the NDP back home. His wife ran a number of years ago.

Q: So you came to Alberta what year?

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. So I'd been collecting silver, and my grandfather had given me some. The old coins before '67 were

all silver. So I sold those and came out. Everybody was saying, you'll be back in three months; you'll be back in three months. It's 25 years later, and I'm still here. I came to Calgary. My first job in Calgary was as a security guard, and I worked at Gulf Canada Square. Interestingly enough, that was my first union involvement. A fellow by the name of Ron Brown was with CUPE. They 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. 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. I remember having to read off my notes.

Q: What sort of things had you written?

CT: It's 25 years ago... It would be things like, if you join the union you're going to lose your job, that type of thing. It wasn't anything drastic. I guess it was drastic, 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 British Columbia, and didn't want any union involvement in Alberta. They had the contracts at the airport; they had the contracts at 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--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. And all the overtime I wanted, like 16 hour days, 19 hour days if you wanted. It was just wonderful, when you were 22. And you really didn't have a choice in the matter; you had to work it. Because people wouldn't show up, you'd be at a worksite, you'd be stuck. And I think in 1980 there were still lots of jobs around. So getting people and keeping people was a challenge. So I guess that made things a little better for us. I think we even got a raise to \$4.75 an hour at one point. After I was here for a while... I came out in February, 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. I don't know. 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 you had to take a six week course out here to get on in the hospital as a unit clerk. I thought, I can't really afford to do that on \$4.50 an hour; I can't go back to school. So I was working security, and then I got a second job working as a cleaning lady. So 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. 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. So that was really good. So I actually started working in emergency.

Q: What year?

CT: That was December of 1980. So I started working there, and I think I was making \$8 an hour. What a difference between non-union and going into a union job. And of course at that point I hadn't even made the association that one was union and one wasn't union. I hadn't had not a lot of thoughts about it. Those came later. It wasn't much later. There was a woman on the floor. Alice Spencer was her name, 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 he wasn't very nice. He was actually quite abusive. I got to a point where--I have a bit of an Irish temper--I kinda said to him, goddamn you, why don't you grow up? Then I realized, this guy's here and he's sick; I shouldn't have done that. So I went and told my boss, which was my first mistake, and said, look, 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'm suspended. I'm going, why am I being suspended? Well we have progressive disciplinary action here. If you do something wrong, then you 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 recognize that I did something wrong. Isn't that what when you discipline someone not to do things wrong? Yeah. I said, well I don't understand why I'm being disciplined. So I went and got my shop steward. I filed a grievance, and after that started going to union meetings, cuz I'd never gone to one 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 him speaking that made me come back to want to learn more about it. So that was really good. Then as I went to union meetings, of course I've always been a shy, quiet person, never spoke out of turn. I would bring up points at union meetings and people would say, hmm. So the next thing you know, I was elected as Vice President off the floor. It was Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 8. At that time it had about 3,200 members. It looked after everybody at the General Hospital, which at that time was quite massive, as well as it had a number of Care West facilities. It had George Boyak and Fanning and Glenmore Park. And 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 one time, if I remember correctly. We had some colourful characters back then. There was Glenmore Park Nursing Home, Mayfair, Glenmorgan, I can't remember them all there was actually quite a few. It was interesting, a big organization to get involved in. Eventually I started getting involved in everything. The union 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 convention. Somebody had brought up an issue on equality for women and standing up for women's rights. I got up and spoke against it. It was like, why do we need 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 Godan who lived here in Calgary. Lynne worked at the Holy Cross Hospital. She came and talked to me after. She 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 actually she did. She took the time with me after, and pointed out some of the history and what had been going on, and why there was need for equality programs and affirmative action and things of that nature. It was like, you know what, this is a whole new world to me. This is not something that I 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 it sort of fulfilled my wannabe teacher thing from back in university. But it taught me a lot of personal strengths. 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. God knows where I'd be if I hadn't, to be honest with you.

Q: Do you remember any incidents or events in those early years?

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 the conventions. This was on the way to them, and the comments that were being made about some of the women. This one's easy, that one's easy; we'll have fun with her. I got upset; I got really upset. At that point I'd made a decision in my life, that being involved in the union was important. To go and hear this stuff was very hurtful. I made a pact with myself that, if you're going to get involved in this, then you have to make a separation. You're either involved in it serious, or you're in it for fun. I decided I was going to get involved in it and be serious. So I actually took these men to task and said, you're talking about sisters here. If this is how you're going to talk about them, and you want me along for the ride, I'm not 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; he'd say, oh yeah, we'll help this woman, because she had big breasts. This was the president of the union at the time, and these were some of the things that you had to deal with. I remember another one making a comment about a Black woman who was on our executive: oh yeah, it's good to have the soots around. These were 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 leaders of the local at that time. Let's just say I wasn't a happy camper, and decided to do something about it. I was going to run for a position, I think it was 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; he wasn't one of those guys. But there were just other areas. So I actually got elected by the women into that position. He ran again, and I ran for the position also. 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 colour of their skin or because they had big breasts or not. It wasn't going to be the boys at the top making the decisions; it was going to be me as chief shop steward, as to how grievances were going to be handled. That made a big difference.

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

CT: The boys at the top hated me more, which was fine. I learned to handle that. And there were some deliberate attempts at sabotaging me. I remember this one incident, where one of them actually set me up. I was floored. I went back to him after and went right into the butcher shop. I said, 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, but they had to protect themselves.

Q: But did you actually have a positive effect on the world that you were working in?

CT: What I saw was a lot more women coming to union meetings. We made some changes in the bylaws. We ended up getting subsidies for childcare, for people to attend

union meetings. There were all kinds of little changes that made it easier and 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 any children. Then oh God, I remember going to a CUPE convention in Lethbridge. This was 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 had resolutions on health and safety, I had resolutions 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 it was 1990. The unions had been talking about equal rights; there'd been acceptance at the national. I was floored. I 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. 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. From there, the rally started. After I got off the mike, I don't know how many brothers and how many sisters got up and condemned what was done. That's what had to happen. The president of the local of the guy that made the comment came and spoke to me. I didn't use his name

on the floor. I didn't think that was necessary; he knew who he was. But it eventually got figured out, because somebody saw him come and speak to me right after. The president of his local came and talked to me and I told him what happened. He went and he dealt with that member, and that member came and apologized. For that to happen was a big thing. We actually ended up being quite good friends after that. It was more of a, okay, I've done wrong, I'm here to learn. Much like what I had done to Lynne Godan 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 AUP, Foothills Hospital, back in the early '80s, into one local. We had saw what was happening. Lynne and I tried to facilitate meetings through the labour council to get this moving. It unfortunately fell through, and then ended up being forced 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?

CT: I was at the General for 18 years. I was there until they blew the General up.

Q: Describe what it was like working in health care at that time.

CT: I started working at the General in December of '80. It wasn't bad. Working in health care back then was actually pretty good. You had a lot of nurses on the floor; patients

were being looked after. There was enough staff to get the work done. You didn't go home feeling totally exhausted at the end of each day. Things started to change slightly. They started hiring more administrators and cutting back on staff. I guess they had to pay one administrator salary was to two staff salaries. So two staff for every administrator seemed to be the ratio at the time. That got progressively worse. You started seeing cutbacks in the nursing staff. Things started changing as far as patient care went. Patients were being discharged from the hospitals earlier. There were rumblings about governments cutting services. Actually this started back in '88, if I'm not mistaken. They were trying to de-insure services. There was a surge then of people concerned about the direction that the government was taking with healthcare. There were organizations set up throughout the province. I remember one woman, Elaine Husband. She was involved with the NDP and city council and healthcare. I remember meeting her. I actually told her later, I still see her now, and told 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, after some of the comments I made earlier. I shouldn't say that, because in their hearts they were good trade unionists. They wanted to fight for people, they just had their priorities wrong as to who they should fight for. But 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. That happens. So, 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. I remember in 1993, not that long ago, it's 12 years ago, I remember they were cutting \$93 million out of the healthcare budget.

Q: Twenty percent.

CT: Yeah. And Klein had just become premier at that point. There was a provincial election coming and I thought, what am I going to do? I knew that they were heading to privatization. I had read enough on healthcare. I'd 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. I 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. I knew nothing about education. I knew nothing 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. It 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, 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, and 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. That proved to be quite interesting. It was at a community centre. I didn't drive. I never had a driver's license. So getting around was actually quite a challenge. I have to mention this. I got to a lot of picket lines in my lifetime. Gordon Christie was responsible. He would bang at my door at 4 o'clock in the morning and wake me up and drag me to picket lines. I have to thank him for that; otherwise I'd miss a lot of sunrises. He got me into a lot of trouble too, but that's another story. Anyway, I had to write a speech. I'd really never done anything like this before. My first attempt at public speaking was a complete failure. That was when I was with CUPE. 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 Bockwell, 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, cuz 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. Royal Harris, I think, taught it. It sort of gave me my wings from there. So I had to write a speech. I'm thinking, okay, what do I know? I know about healthcare; so that's all I can write about. So my friend Elaine Husband happened along and she said, what are you doing? I said, I'm writing my speech. I said, would you mind reading it over? Well by the end of the night I had a phenomenal speech, because Elaine was just... she used to write for the Calgary Herald and stuff like that. She was informed and knew how to set words. Anyway, we got to the hall after the speech. She wouldn't let me out of the car until I

could read the speech perfect, had the accents in the right place. I'll tell you, what a difference it made. There were parts of my speech where I was booed; there were parts where people applauded. But it got the points home. We ended up revealing a little scam that one of Klein's finance men had got some property out in Canmore, through the Treasury Branch, through a numbered company. Got the golf course approved and didn't have to go through an environmental evaluation. So that was interesting. But again, 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. But 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 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. I was just floored. This was 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, can't you make the connection? Put the dots together and 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; these were union members that were 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?

CT: It did. They ended up getting rid of all the hospital boards, and making regional health authorities, and putting in more administrators. Of course with more administrators, more cutbacks. You started seeing contracting out of housekeeping. That was the 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'd been making when I started doing housekeeping in 1980.

Q: What about patient care?

CT: Patient care was, and you know I guess patient care, in my opinion, deteriorated. One, the nurses were run off their feet. They didn't have time to talk to patients anymore. At one point you'd see nurses go in and they'd take some time with the patient, explain things to them. Now it was rush in, give them their meds, rush out, get to the next one. It was like, 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 just reeling. 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. 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. Try and call some of the doctors that were working at the private clinic. The lineups from when that 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. They were spending all their time at the private hospital, because they were getting paid more money.

Q: Tell us about this private hospital.

CT: HRG. When they started closing the hospitals, they allowed a private clinic to open. This private clinic was run by doctors. Basically they did private contracts. They did Blue Cross, they did WCB, private insurance claims. And they paid more money than the government paid the doctors for their services. So the doctors were working both systems. They were working in the public and they were working in the private. The waiting lists for patients who weren't insurance patients was 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. To be honest, 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 saw the "de-Klein" of the healthcare system.

Q: We're right in the midst of the decline of the healthcare system, and here we are in a hospital where you notice drastic reductions that were going on until about '95 and then things started happening. Talk about it.

CT: We had a number of things happen because of the cutbacks. There were threats of closure. We were in the middle of negotiations, we were in provincial negotiations, and the employer broke off and said that they had to deal with a special issue at the General Hospital.

Q: What year?

CT: This was about '94. The special issue was they were going to shut the laundry down. The only way they were going to keep it open is if we would negotiate rollbacks. I knew these people personally. I went and talked to them and said, here's what's going to happen: we can either take a rollback in wages or we're going to lose our jobs, one or the other. They said, Clancy, you have to do what you have to do. So I negotiated a rollback;

it was about \$2 an hour for each of them. All the numbers the employer had given us showed us that the laundry was running in the red and that it had to change or they were going to shut it down. So we negotiated, well I negotiated, the rollback and the members ratified it and life went on.

Q: It wasn't just your hospital, was it?

CT: No. No, actually it was just our hospital at that point. At that point it was just the laundry at the General. So life went on, the battles continued; there were more cutbacks. Then all of a sudden one day I get a call, and the people in the laundry had walked off the job. I generally ran over to the union office at lunchtime and I'd found out, or someone came to the unit and told me; I can't remember exactly how. So I left work and went out on the picket line, and I never went back to work. What had happened was, because of the rollback I'd negotiated, probably one of the most shameful things I've ever done in my life and will never do again – lesson learned – they took the laundry from the red into the black and it was now making a profit. So it was saleable; so they were selling it to K-Bro. I wasn't there when they broke the news to them, and I guess the reaction--I remember one of the women saying it was like being kicked in the stomach. They'd taken the \$2 an hour rollback to save their jobs, and here the hospital was turning around and selling it out from under them. For them it was something they weren't prepared to handle, and they walked. No ifs, ands or buts: if this is what you think of us, we're out of here. That's how the little spark started. From there, the laundry workers at the General all walked out. The laundry workers from the Foothills Hospital had received the same news at the same time. They got wind of what had happened, they walked out, and then slowly members of CUPE started walking out in support and wouldn't go back to work. Nurses started walking the line, health sciences started walking the line, the guild at that time started walking the line, and it grew. It started in Calgary. The next thing I know I'm on the picket line and I get a phone call from CUPE Local 936, the maintenance workers. They looked after the Holy Cross and what's the other hospital? I can't remember. The

Rockyview and Colonel Belcher. They had left, they had walked off the job, and they were coming down to the picket line. They didn't even have a laundry, but this is the effect this had. It was like, enough is enough. The cutbacks have to stop somewhere, and it took this kick in the stomach to these laundry workers who had already taken a \$2 an hour rollback to save their jobs. It just went from there; it grew. We were getting calls that people were walking out all over the province. Sometimes it was just at noon hour; sometimes it was for a whole day. But it grew and it grew and it grew. I remember doctors coming down. I remember people I'd never seen before, people from the university coming down and walking the picket line, members of the public coming and walking the picket line. It was awesome. And then little pickets were starting up all over the city in different places, in front of nursing homes. I think almost every hospital in the province had some sort of action, whether it was leafleting, whether it was a lunchtime picket, there was something going on. It was like Klein had to blink or that was going to be it. And he did; he did. I think the scary part, it wasn't scary, for me, it was disappointing. You can't really blame anybody, but at the time health sciences and the nurses were both voting whether to strike or not, whether to join the picket line. I didn't pray much those days, but I was praying that they would. I was thinking if they decided as provincial bodies that they were going to come out, or even if they just did it in Calgary, we could turn this whole thing around; we could just straighten out all of the problems. And they didn't. The votes were very close from both the health sciences and the nurses. I remember some of the members coming back so disappointed; especially the ones from the General were so disappointed that the votes didn't go through. They didn't want to go back to work; they just wanted to stay on the picket line. They really didn't have a choice. I was so proud of them but disappointed in the big picture union. Things started changing after that. Of course your national gets involved and it takes on a life of its own. It lost the people struggle at that point. Unfortunately, decisions were made that were not made by the people who were out on the wildcat; decisions were made by leaders. Unfortunately they were union leaders, but they were part and parcel of it. I still remember the meeting we had to end the strike. That's the first time I was ever really mad

at my union. I remember taking a megaphone and slamming it on the stage. I was so disappointed. We could've done so much here, and it was just all taken away, and for nothing.

Q: But Klein did blink. What did they win?

CT: For the workers there were some offerings of jobs; there were no guarantees. To me it wasn't much of a blink.

Q: They postponed the privatization.

CT: They did postpone the privatization. CUPE actually was allowed to enter a bid, which we'd never even thought of doing before. But it was exposed that the whole bidding process had been set up; but we were able to get that straightened out. We made a bid, but we were unsuccessful. K-Bro still ended up getting it, but that was down the road. I guess a little more attention started being paid to healthcare and what was going on. It didn't stop hospitals from closing; it didn't stop the deterioration of the healthcare system, unfortunately. I think what was so important about this laundry workers' strike is that people saw this as the catalyst for trying to protect healthcare. They were so upset with the direction that healthcare was taking, and I think that's why these workers got so much public support. It was like their struggle was to try and change everybody's fears or a direction for everybody with fears about where healthcare was going. It was their opportunity to say, enough is enough, where the public came down to the picket lines, where the public dropped off money. You don't see that in Alberta. Everybody getting involved in a strike? I mean, it was amazing. It was the fear of what was going on with healthcare that was creating it.

Q: Do you remember the Bill 11 protests? At what point did they blow up your hospital?

CT: I can't remember.

Q: At what point did you leave?

CT: I left, I believe it was '96 and I went to work with everybody else over at the Peter Lougheed. They had closed the Holy Cross by that time after doing millions of dollars of renovations, and they sold it dirty cheap to a private company that now runs healthcare facilities out of it and everything else. They had closed the Grace and the HRG, the private hospital set up in there. And, what to do with the General? What to do with the General? Well they had a plan for the General that was a little bit different than everyone else, although a lot of the buildings in the General were new, actually some of them newer than the Foothills Hospital. There were always these innuendos that there were philosophical challenges and political challenges between the Foothills and the General. The people that ran the Foothills were very much Tory – the Nancy Betkowskis, her brothers, that type of thing. They were very Tory. The Liberals, however, seemed to dominate the General. Was it politically motivated? Was it professional jealousies? Was it that there were too many activists coming out of that area? Was it that because it was city centre and there was so much fight there's only one way to destroy the fight and that's to take away what people were fighting about, and that was the catalyst, the area around the General? What did they do? They blew it up. Literally. We had put on campaigns with the community that were amazing. Some of the people that came out I couldn't believe. We had organized, we had contacted seniors' groups, church groups, political groups. It didn't matter whether you were Liberal, NDP, Conservative – they all had this one common link. This one common line was one, what was going on with healthcare and two, we need to keep our downtown hospital. All politics were put aside. We got the community centre in Bridgeland involved. We held sessions there all the time. We were constantly arming the community. We were training people to be leaders, to hold rallies. We were giving them education. We had strategists from the community coming in, people that you wouldn't expect to get involved. It was actually amazing. I remember

putting on a few workshops on different issues, using our CLC guidebook on how to do it, which was really cool, because it just made life so much simpler. But it was amazing. We were doing press stuff, we were doing media, we were doing door to door, [and] we were doing pamphlet handling. It was a whole campaign, and it was people from the community that were doing it, all political issues put aside, all for one reason.

Q: They blew it up anyway.

CT: They blew it up anyway.

Q: Why did Klein remain so popular down here? In the following election, he swept the province more dramatically than ever before. What thoughts do you have about that?

CT: When you look at what's happened politically, I can only guess. Almost everybody I talk to says, I never voted for Klein. The one question I always forget to ask them was, did you vote? The more I think about it, I think that's probably more of the problem than anything else. All of the people who were devastated by him were not going to vote for him. So, obviously they're either so fed up with the system or feel so defeated that they don't even go and cast a ballot anymore. If that's what's happening, then that's scary. If you look at it, it's 60 percent voter turnout if we're lucky. So yes, you didn't vote for Klein, but the issue is did you vote for anybody. I think that's the real issue.

[END]