

UNA Centennial Project-Nursing History-Trudy Richardson-Dec 15/05

I Interviewer

S Speaker

S My name is Trudy Richardson and I've worked with the United Nurses of Alberta since 1984.

I And you don't, you just ignore the camera.

S Ignore it, all right, all right.

I Since 1984?

S Yeah.

I Okay, but your involvement with you and UNA began before that.

S Yeah my involvement began in '79. I was working with the Learners Center and Third World Development groups and we saw the news one night that there was this group of nurses that had formed a union and within like very few, like a week or two weeks or something they formed the union and they were on strike and I never understood it. And the thing that stands out in my mind is the man who kept being interviewed for this new group of nurses. The union guy was Mike Mearns who at that time thought that time must be working for the union. He wasn't; he was on the board and he was a head of the negotiating committee and I remember the first notion I had in my head is how odd it is that a man would be representing and being interviewed by, you know, for these nurses. Now my background is my mother's a nurse. So I had a natural interest in this and I was involved in the Alberta status of Women Action Committee as ... here. So this was a group of women whose wages were so desperately out of proportion to the work that they did and the hours were so grim and I knew that as a child watching my mother go to work and the hours that are stripped away from families and stuff by nurses that I got interested in that; and the only thing we did, the group of us that were around the Learners Center at that time, was we picketed at the Royal Alec and at the Edmonton General in support of these nurses. And they got a contract. We didn't know anything about the bargaining process; they got a contract and then they went back to work and that was in the 1978, no 77', 77 strike, yeah.

I Who was the group? I worked, you know, I worked at the Learners Center, right.

S Yeah.

I So who was working. Who was working. Was that --

S Debra Ransom --

I Okay, who I've never met.

S Whose now, was a UNA member. She's Public Health Nurse up in Athabasca. Jim Croll--

I Okay, Jim yeah.

S Priscilla.

I Okay, Priscilla Boucher.

S Boucher, I couldn't remember her last name.

I I worked with her. And I know Jim very well.

S Yes. There was also Peter Puxley, Wilf Bean, and Jerry.

I Givoe.

S No, not Jerry Givoe. These three guys that had worked for the Dene up in North West Territories. [ALHI: it was Gerald Sutton]

I ...

S No, he was a lawyer. And the three, we hired the three of them. I was on the board of the Learners Center. We hired the three of them to come down from Yellowknife and work full time for the Learners Center. And they all, Peter and Lois were married and lived in their house with their kids but then we had this kind of group place where Priscilla and Wilf and a whole bunch of set of common folk all lived and we used to have meetings at the house. I mean it was just as well as the Learners Center. And then the Learners Center moved over to Mount Carmel School on the south side and we had this big open space and the Learners Center was in it as was Canada World Youth as was STOPS- Save Tomorrow Post Pollution with ..., and Jean Poulin, Louise Swift, Linda Duncan --

I Oh really, I didn't know that.

S And Alex Pringle, who was our lawyer getting us out of trouble. And then literally I was in the closet. I had the closet for my office and at that point I worked for Ten days for World Development for the churches. So everyday we all worked together and everyday if we had any meetings or something we would go over to this house that, where people were and it was Priscilla and I that pinpointed what is going on with this nurses' group. Now there was this big strike

in '77 when UNA first became a union. That was settled relatively quickly and there wasn't any other collective bargaining news about the nurses on the news; as far as I was concerned it wasn't an issue. We were working on saving the rest of the world until 1980 when another great big strike happened at UNA.

I Was it a provincial strike as well?

S Yes. The first strike was a very small strike because they didn't have a whole lot of locals and they had only two months dues in the banks; so when they got threatened with fines they scurried back to work quite literally. The history that I have in my mind about UNA is the first time the government or the law, you know the courts step in and threaten nurses, it frightens them, and then they do what they're told. The next time they used the same threat against the nurses. The nurses basically say, we're not afraid of that and so then it takes a bigger push to get them back and so in '79 the strike was short. I think that was the one we called the bikini strike where the employers got an injunction that the nurses couldn't wear a bikini on the picket line, literally. Yeah, literally. And there wasn't, and they didn't, I guess the way you would say it is the nurses didn't seem to be; this new little nurses' union didn't seem to be any threat to be any threat to anybody-- like a mosquito bite, you know. Then in 1980 came a much bigger strike. Again it was wages. Again it was major problems and again I was not a part of UNA and by this time I was working down in the inner city. I was working at the Boyle Street Coop and again I was involved in the feminist movement and the same group of people with a few people added in like Nick and over at the Learners Center got concerned again when the nurses hit the pavements again. And this time we phoned and said to UNA, what can we do? We are an interested group. And they were very surprised that this group of, set of lefties from town would phone. And they told us the three things that we could do for them is number one, picket with them because they were short of pickets and not go to the big hospitals but go to some of the smaller places where the lines were thinner. They had fewer employees; it was harder to maintain the picket lines, which made a great deal of sense. The second thing they said is, if there's some way you could collect money for us, you know to support the nurses and the third thing, which was always the hardest thing to respond to was: can you organize a rally? So we did that. We organized a big rally down at the Legislature. It now, what was that, that was the 1980 strike. I need to cheat for a second. Yeah. 1980 strike. So bad were the wages that UNA's ingoing proposal was for a wage increase of 33.3% and the employer offered a 29% wage increase but they refused professional responsibility committees. They said the questions of professional responsibility didn't lie with the nurses. That was management's responsibility and nurses should just do what they were told and not question the professional judgment of the employer regarding nursing. Anyway the nurses said what an insult 29% wage increase was and went out on strike and they, the government had done what it had done in 1977 and said, you bad girls go back to work or we're going to fine you and they threatened big fines. And the nurses said, you threatened that in 79. We were afraid of it; we went

back to work. This time go ahead; we're not afraid of you and this was a first time that a group of women stood up to the government and said no, we're not going to do what you are telling us to do. Now the government then had to take them seriously. I don't think until up until that point that UNA as a union or as a group had been looked at with any you know. So it got very thick at that point. Very late night negotiations but UNA had a great strategy because it was at that point--Simon Renouf was the Executive Director by that point and the back to work order came and UNA challenged it; I believe either Thursday night or Friday morning legally with the idea that the people or the person or whatever who had given the order didn't have the legal right to do so. So we questioned it on some vague legalism. And the purpose of that was to bargain not to go back to work but to put huge pressure on getting a professional responsibility committee. So now that I have been on the inside of UNA I know the story of that; the nurses said no we won't go back to work. Well in those days judges finished work at noon on Friday to go golfing or to do whatever judges do and it wasn't likely that you were going to get a court sitting until Monday. So it was a strategic move on the part of UNA to gain the right to bargain Friday; Friday night; Saturday; and they never went to bed. They just bargained right through that weekend, hour after hour after hour. Now there were two huge impediments you know; one was this, the question of wages and at some point early in that marathon the employer agreed to I think it was 39.8% which was 10% higher than their last offer and more than the nurses. So obviously they knew these nurses were serious and it also indicated how badly paid they had been if you know a 40% wage increase like that doesn't happen often. But what held, what they held up for the second huge thing was a professional responsibility committee. They were more insulted by the nurses' demand for a say in the quality of health care that was being delivered than they were about whatever the money was and it was only into the very, very early morning of the Sunday night-Monday morning that they finally agreed to the professional responsibility committee. Now during that period of time I wasn't in UNA and I didn't know what they were doing late at night and I didn't know the finessing of all this legal strategy. But what I did know, was I remember calling UNA and saying to them you know, what do you need and they said we need –

I        You already helped the rally?

S        Yeah, no they told us these three things. So we did all those things but the one thing they kept telling us was we need a professional responsibility committee. Help us get that message out. And quite frankly I didn't understand what they were talking about. Why would nurses need a professional responsibility committee? They are professionals. And I didn't realize the total disregard in the health care system of nurses' judgment and nurses' ability to critique the quality of care and it came to me as an astounding you know even as the daughter of a nurse I had always seen that the public held them in such high regard. The families held them in high regard. The patients were always grateful. I mean not always but the system itself I finally realized treated them

like nothing short of hired help, like they were just servants to do whatever doctors and now administrators told them to do. So the 1980 strike was less about money although that was certainly a high priority and it was very big on professional responsibility. Once that got through my head we were able as a group that had been out there strategizing trying to figure out how to get people to understand world hunger and stuff like that how to get the public to realize that what nurses were about had to do with them wanting to have a professional stake and a say in the delivery of health care. So we made that one of the things of the rally and I remember we also passed out bedpans to collect money and the UNA bussed nurses up from Calgary to do the rally and it was a big rally. And I am trying to think of the; this was an April strike. So it was a really easy rally to get lots of people out and lots of action. So then they got their 39.8 wage increase, they got their professional responsibility committee, and they all went back to work and I didn't follow up again until I ended up writing the history document years later about all the legalities that went on after that to settle out the things that had, you know that were still on the table and all of that. And I didn't realize that there were still major things that the nurses had not achieved in 80 that they were going to have to go after you know again. So the 82 round of bargaining began. Again I was working at the Boyle Street Coop. But this time I had more of a sense of who UNA was. I had met Sheila Greckol who was the lawyer and I had met Margaret Ethier who was the president. I'd met her like a couple years before during the strike and so I had a little bit more familiarity with the organizations. So the minute that I heard that they were going on strike I said to myself okay it's time to get this group together. Now we'd all spread out and we would change jobs and we weren't all in the Learners Center and the house that people had shared had split up and people were in different places. But a whole lot of groups had started to get more interested, particularly women's groups, to understand this was a women's issue and something that should be grappled with. So the 1982 strike, as soon as we heard there was the possibility of strike action, we contacted the union and Margaret who was at the bargaining table with Simon and the rest of the team had little time to talk to us. So she said I'm going to give you the name of one of our board members who's also the president of the Edmonton General. Her name is Barb Sytkowski and she's going to be your person to contact because it's always more helpful if people who want to support the strike actually ask strikers what they need and do that rather than dream up some actions which may or may not be helpful. At that point, this a very...In my mind the 82' strike. I had a friend who lives in Peru named Jorge Alvaras Calderon. He is one of the co-founders of the theology of liberation. He is a man of worldwide renown in terms of his writing about what it is to work from a base of the poor and the communidata is the bus in Latin America and the priests of the archdioceses of Edmonton were having their annual retreat and they had invited Horke up to speak to them as their main –

I Keynote speaker –

S Not just keynote speaker but all through the week of their retreat to talk to the about. Yeah the ...and how do we bring it to out of Latin America, bring it to Edmonton. Yeah, anyway so I picked Jorge up at the airport and you know we were chatting about things and he said so tell me what's happening in Edmonton. Well of course the first thing on my tongue was we've got a nurses' strike going on right now and it's huge and it's 40 below and the nurses are out in the snow pounding the picket lines and their issues are the following and so I am working with them. Now he'd already been down to the Boyle Street Coop and he did that again and we talked. So it wasn't just about nurses but this idea of the nurses being on strike really caught his imagination. So he goes out to St. Albert for this week-long retreat with all these priests and the very first morning they're expecting to hear him talk about the poor Latin America and how they organize and all that and so he said to them: so what's the news of the week?. What's going on in Edmonton? Not one mentioned the nurses' strike. They mentioned other things and he said well I have a newspaper here; the headline says that the nurses are on strike and they said oh yeah, yeah, yeah, and yeah and he said well are any of you involved in that. And they said no and I don't know this and I shouldn't be quoted on this but I think the attitude was they're just greedy nurses out for more money. I mean there was no sense that this was a social issue. So Jorge said to me, he called me and he said could you find some nurses to come out to St. Albert to spend the morning talking about their issue?. What is that they are out on strike for? Why are, I don't know at that time 8000 women walking the pavement at 40 below zero to make their point. So I once again called UNA: Barb Sytkowski and Irene Gwen and two or three others who were on the executive of the Edmonton General. We all go out to St. Albert. It was the most fascinating day I've ever seen. These nurses simply went through their lists of demands, like the top priority demands and explained why they needed this and why they needed that and these priests were saying, well don't you have that, like, well would it would be taken for granted that you would have a say in the quality of health care? What do you mean you don't get paid overtime or whatever the issues were? They were totally amazed; so then Jorge said to them: so what's you respond as priests in the dioceses. What's your role? If you want to talk about the theology of liberation it means taking people's lives and helping them lift themselves to a better place and every one of you is going back to a large parish of people whom you can influence and what are you going to say about the nurses' strike? And were any of you ever going to mention the nurses' strike to begin with. If you want to know what the theology of liberation is, this is what we do in Latin America. We work with struggling groups to pull themselves up and you guys better think long and hard about what your sermon is going to look like on Sunday about what these nurses are out on the pavement for and you've have to take to the risk. You can't say yeah but I've got some people in my parish who are administrators of hospitals and you have to go well it was very interesting for the nurses to hear this but I think the nurses did an astounding job and again it was 41 below and again it was freezing and again they were on the, and again they asked us to walk the picket lines and they asked us also to do a rally which is a whole different experience when you're

doing it 40 below in front of the Legislature and it was my best judgment at that point that the government all, they didn't have to negotiate with us they just had to lock the doors and let us freeze to death out in the cold. It was very, very cold and I remember having, we organized a huge group of people and we got endorsements from the NDP, we got endorsements, and the Communist party and when I introduced off the back of the truck the Communist Party was supporting the nurses. The nurses all started booing. I was going oh God no. Anyway we had Connie Kaldor there as a singer –

I Really.

S -- And I turned around and I said Connie is supposed to be here. Where's Connie? And she pulls her scarf down, says I'm here, pulls it back up. Like that's, you know all the musical instruments were out of tune because it was so cold. Now right at this precise moment Les Young who was the minister of labour comes, sends a wrap out and he, no he didn't send a wrap he came out onto the steps and said I want to talk to the person who's in charge of this rally. Somebody got me and I went up and he said I'd like to have you'd into my office to have tea with you. I said Mr. Young I am running a rally here; if you want to wait an hour I will come in and have tea with you but I will, you know I will come with the nurses whose issue this is. He said I can't have any nurses in my office and I said well then you're the minister of labour; you can have anybody you want in your office. And if you want tea with us it will be with us. So he went in; we had the rally. I don't know what Brian thought when he got booed. They got on the buses. The nurses all went home and the president of the Royal Alec at that time and I can't remember her name--she was quite a feisty, talkative, she didn't take any guff from anyone. It was Barb Sytkowski and a couple of other from the Edmonton General. I don't remember who else and one other person who wasn't a nurse. There was me and there was someone else and we were representing I think at that point ASWAC [ALHI: Alberta Status of Women Action Committee], I don't know, concerned citizens for nurses. I don't know; whatever name we made up for ourselves. Anyway Les Young served us all, we all called tea, it was a powdered tea; it was awful anyway. He served us this tea and he says what are your issues and so this nurse from the Alex starts talking and she's telling him the issues and you can just about hear him going well the problem with bargaining issues is you asked for too many things like we have 200 unsold things on the table, like if you would only come to the table asking for the first ten things that are important but you gum it all up by asking for too much and you know it went on and he kept trying to address the two of us who weren't nurses. He didn't want to talk to the nurses. So we kept pulling back and then at one point I said the bottom line here Mr. Young is are you going to order the nurses back to work. And he said I'm the minister of labour, I cannot do a back to work order; that's the minister of health. And I said no you're wrong; you are the minister of labour and you can do a back to work order and we're asking are you going to do that. And he said I give you my word I will not. The next day he issued a back to work order. So you get that; I saw right up and front what the

nurses were dealing with in terms of a government that was now taking them very seriously.

I Is this the same Les Young that is now the –

S He's on the pension board –

I The chairperson of the nurses' –

S The nurses, the LAPB yes, and I said when Richard was there, ... was the chair; he said Les Young is really helpful on the board. I said don't talk to me about Les Young and don't let him pour you a cup of tea, I'll tell you. Anyway that was '82 and again there were back to work orders. They defied the back to work orders, they were fined, you know once again the scenery played itself whatever they threatened last time that got them back didn't work the next time and then life kind of calmed down because the nurses had achieved huge, huge gains in the 82' strike. Between the strike in 80 and 82 it was, they had gained an awful lot and it was time to consolidate and then the bargaining tables after 82 so that would have been in 84 and in 86 –

I Didn't they make their achievements in 84? Didn't they not make much in 82? They went back to work but it was 84 they got –

S -- Yeah, yeah but it like it took time for everything to consolidate. Yeah you never get it the year that you go on strike; well you do, you get a 39.8% wage increase but when they know how serious you are at the bargaining table in 82' put them on, then it becomes important. So from 82 to 88 there was this consolidation of gains. There was this evening out of the collective agreement for the hospitals; it was learning about what all the words meant. It was practicing and pushing our language to the hilt and we did much more arbitration at that time than we ever did, bargaining. However there was a group of nurses who were being pushed around by the health unit association of Alberta and that were our public health nurses. And they were getting poor wage settlements because in order to become a public health nurse originally you had to have a degree in nursing and so there was a kind of elitism amongst public health nurses that they were the green nurses and the hospital nurses were mere diploma nurses. So you can even see that split; there was a kind of elitism, but after the hospital nurses had done all this dramatic work the health unit nurses were getting left farther and farther behind. During that period of time I came on staff in 84' and I was doing the health unit bargaining.

I Can you tell us how did you come to be on staff?

S We had a women's conference on a ranch somewhere out of Calgary. Alberta Status of Women, we organized a I don't know a weekend or a long week, I don't know; we organized something and I invited the same group of



nurses; Margaret, Barb Sytkowski, Sheila Greckol, the lawyer, to come and talk to us about what had happened in the 82 strike and what their gains had been and they were, like the union had now become a fascinating thing to me that it was women who were pushing so hard that a group that had been so disdained and seen as insignificant had now become the number one enemy of the Conservative government of Alberta. I mean the nurses were in their face and they were pushing back and the disdain that was shown to them and the contempt because they were women was obvious. So we had picked this up as a women's cause. We wanted them to come down and share their views. So I remember they drove up, they were late, they got out of the car and they were all talking about stuff and I said you know, I'd just been talking about you guys and I said to Margaret, I want to work for UNA. Tell me when there's a job open, and they all started laughing and it turns out that the reason they were late was Margaret had just fired one of the labour relations officers and there was a job opening and they looked at me like how did you know this. I mean they didn't say that but they said how did you know. Anyway we did the thing down there and they did their piece and things worked out and I got a call from Margaret and she said were you serious and I said yeah and she said there is an opening and that's how I found out that. And there's another whole side to that story but anyway I applied for the job and that was in May of 83 and they had to go through the arbitration that the staff person had challenged and I had an interview. Simon said I am offering you the job but he said we have to wait to see the results. The results of the arbitration were that the –

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S -- Were that the LRO, the employee –

I If you do that, we're not going to hear your voice.

S The employees' relations group actually won the arbitration and it was found that UNA should not have fired her but the relationship had soured so badly that they gave her a big payout and she was gone. So I'd kind of been hanging by my fingernails from May when this all happened to the following March in 84 and that's when I started. And I started as a labour relations officer. Now from 84' to 2003 I've been a labour relations officer. Then I became-- teaching is my background-- so I became, I picked up the education job when it was available. I went back to being a labour relations officer and I was an LRO during the 88, I think I was; yeah I was. But in the meantime I was doing the bargaining for the health units and in 85 the health units went on strike and this was almost an unwinnable strike. It was just about unwinnable because so what if a baby doesn't get their vaccination this week; so what if the baby doesn't get weighed, so what. And it did cause hardship because there are people in homes that need nurses to come out and do dressing changes and they do very valuable work but it's not that same critical focus; it's almost invisible and it doesn't get the press. You know, not having a surgery and not having a cancer

treatment gets a whole lot more press than I didn't get my dressing changed this week, you know. So the health unit strike was very, very difficult and there were so fewer numbers, I mean when hospitals shut down, it's big; when health units close, nobody even notices in town. The important thing was that the health unit nurses are nurses and we have rights and we--it was a long and very bitter strike and in the end we got very little. And the strike lasted over a year. It was a very hard strike. The good news, of course, was that a lot of the health unit nurses are in small towns 'cause that's where a lot of the health units function.

I ...right.

S Yes, well.

I Wasn't quite province-wide was it?

S Yes it was. Well no it wasn't, there were-- the problem was that each health unit would; they settled at different times, like they'd get tired of the strike and so they'd, so they all took final offers and it was a very difficult strike to administer from the union's point of view and it caused hardship and hard feelings. But the good news was most of those nurses got jobs in the hospitals. I mean, you know they were on strike at the health unit; didn't mean they couldn't go work at the hospital. And they saw that hospital nursing was every bit as difficult, you know, some of the elitism and there was a lot more bonding that went on between our health nurses and anyway we didn't get much except what they got was respect from the employer because the employer had never ever believed that health unit nurses would walk and they did and that was the beginning of getting health unit wages up to par with the hospitals, which we now have and people who join young nurses now who become health unit nurses have no idea how far behind they were and what it took and I think that the nurses in the health unit strike even though it wasn't as dramatic. Most of the province didn't even know there was a strike; it got very little news, and it lasted like a long year. They'll never regain the money that they lost. I mean from there. They lost their seniority; people who were hired much after them had more seniority. Like people who were hired during the strike to come in and scab had more seniority than when these people went back to work, they went back –

I Really messy.

S Well in the year 2005 it's still having its effects. There is still some bad feelings out there about seniority lists and all that kind of stuff. But the major, major this is that they are now considered nurses of equal caliber to hospital nurses and the contracts. We don't have that fight with the employer anymore about whether these nurses are less valuable. Where we have it now is in the nursing homes where they're saying to be a nursing home nurse you don't have to have the same skills as hospital and public health. Well that's what it took. So the 85 strike was very important and I was the negotiator. So it was long and

hard and in the middle of that strike, Simon was let go as the Executive Director and so we had internal chaos in the union.

I Because of the strike.

S No. So we didn't have his leadership which was always very important and to hold it together and create solidarity with the union and all that was a very big-- in today's world when we're bargaining we say that we're not going to sign one contract until the health unit contracts are settled until, you know until the nursing homes, well in those days you could have; you couldn't even have had that dream. So disparate and separate were all these people. So the amount of solidarity that has now reached all branches and types of nursing is much much greater than it was then. So 85 was a very significant but very hard year for the union. And then we hit the famous 1987. We went to a bargaining, what do you call it –

I Exchange.

S No, no when the nurses all meet to put together –

I Demands.

S Demands setting meeting. In the fall of 1987 we had demands setting. Important demands, important priorities, very clear: the negotiating committee went in with great understanding of what it was, of what they were to go in, and Heather Smith was on that negotiating committee, Sandy Rantz, Dale Fior, David Thompson, who was one of our LRO's with the chief negotiator. We went into bargaining and things looked like it was smooth sailing. We exchanged proposals with the employer. They bargained and on January 5<sup>th</sup> they called a reporting meeting. Now, in UNA's world that's pretty fast to be bargaining to call a reporting meeting so the reporting meeting, I hope I got that right, I hope that we didn't have the bargaining, the demands setting in 86'. Whatever, there was a reporting meeting and the reporting meeting seemed to go smoothly. The negotiating committee was up on the stage. There were questions being asked back and forth. Here's the status of bargaining. Here's where we are at. And you would not have thought for a single second that the sword was in the air. Strike was not there. I sat there; I watched the whole thing. Then the bargaining committee reported on one of these very ironic little things that start wars. They reported on the fact that they had made an agreement with the employer on the issue on how long does a nurse that is on WCB or long-term disability accrue vacation credits. And we had had a number of arbitrations wherein the employer said as soon as you go onto long term disability or WCB you don't accrue vacation and the reason is because you can't take vacation from being sick. So you just don't accrue it. And our argument had been yes you do; it says in the ... agreement. It didn't say if you have a cold you don't collect it; so we'd gone to arbitration and the arbitrators, the arbitrations that we had arbitrated had all been

for relatively short periods of time that these nurses had been away. Six months, eight months something like that, and then we had one famous one out of the Lethbridge area and I think she had been away for 18 months. And the arbitrator said yes in all three the employees continue to accrue vacation and then he threw in one of those obiter statements that we all hate which he said, however there must come a time when logic would say that the employer is no longer obligated. But we knew it wasn't 18 months. So sometimes after, maybe 19 months, maybe five years, we didn't know. The negotiating committee had put on the table one of our demands is that we continue to accrue vacation entitlements well on LTD and WCB forever and the employers had said no and had come back and our committee had agreed to something beyond 18 months; it might have been two years, it might have been three years--I don't remember at the moment. Now this was like 99<sup>th</sup> priority on the bargaining list, like this was just a little piece of house cleaning as we were concerned because we won the arbitrations. We knew we had it up to 18 months on the...so we were just, I don't think the negotiating committee was as clear as I've just been because I was sitting there dumbfounded and what I heard them say and I'm thinking that's what the whole missive, nurses must have heard them say is, we gave that up and you don't accrue. And I don't think that anybody ever explained that we had this piece of obiter comment at some point so that the negotiating committee actually got us something better than we had. We had an 18-month one and I think they got two years. But in the minds of the membership the negotiating committee had sold out and not got a forever in there.

I Was this the last issue to be resolved, ... meeting was presenting a deal –

S The wage package, everything looked like, I mean they still had to go in and negotiate some more. But they were reporting back that we were close to a deal and oh by the way we did this thing on two years and all of a sudden the whole place blew up. It blew up. People were getting up to the mike, who do you think you are? You've given something away; we don't take rollback; we're the United Nurses, and somebody stood up and said I move that we take a strike vote and that the wording be: are you prepared to go on strike for an improved offer? And they then asked questions before that motion came up. They asked questions if they could fire the negotiating committee and there was a motion to do so; get off the stage; we want a new committee, you've violated us, you've given away. Now the negotiating committee is going what, we got you, the whole word was a takeaway, a rollback, and a massive misunderstanding between these two, and none of us could gain control of the moment, like to grab that.

I Is this in this book?

S Some of it.

I I didn't know this.

S Oh yeah, it was very fascinating and so then it was explained. I think it was Barry Chivers who was there doing this, might have been Sheila, can't remember, saying yes you could fire a negotiating committee; you have the power to do that but the next negotiating committee is bound by what the first one has agreed to. So it's still in agreement the two years accumulation for vacation, like it's an agreement. So the negotiating committee was hauled over the ...and they were told all right you go back and you tell the employer that no collective agreement will ever be ratified. We will never ratify a collective agreement that has that two years deadline on it, which is called bargaining in bad faith. Once you've made an agreement you don't go back on it and it was assigned. The page was signed. They said go back and tell them and by the way we're going to have a strike vote to see, and it was more a strike vote to give the negotiating committee the power to go back in. I mean I don't think the word strike was in the air then, but it was very clear and the wording was proposed; are you prepared to go on strike for an improved offer? That was the wording, not do you want something better, you know do you like Don Getty or something very vague. It was if you vote, it is, if you don't get an improved offer you're going on strike. We're not going to ask you again in a meeting we didn't get; so now what do we do? We know what, if you don't get an improved offer it's a strike. Now remember this is 88 and the right to strike for nurses had been taken away in 83. After the 82 strike the government was so upset that they took the right to strike away from hospital nurses. Anyway that was the end of the demand setting. So we thought well interesting demand setting –

I Reporting meeting.

S Reporting meeting; that was an interesting reporting meeting. We were all kind of twisted in our heads about what this big hullabaloo had been about this vacation accrual on LTD and WCB. Like how did something so minor become such a big, big deal. And the negotiating committee was somewhat. I mean they were very chastised but they were very nervous about going back to the employer and saying by the way we've met with our members and there's no way that this collective agreement would ratify as long as it's got this two year clause in it on this you know, minor little thing over here. We're okay on all the big stuff but this is. So the employers did what you would expect. They went to the labour relations board and charged the union with bargaining and bad faith. Andy Sims was the head of the labour board at that time and he called for a hearing. It was a cold, cold morning in January and we got there first and we had a rally outside with picket signs because the employer, here's the other reason that a small issue became a world war, the employer charged the union with bargaining in bad faith over this vacation accrual and then said, oh and by the way Mr. Sims, they also passed a motion that they were going to have a strike vote which reads are you, they were going to have a vote which reads are you prepared to go on strike unless you get an improved offer. And looking at the act we think it's not only going on strike that is prohibited by the act that they had passed in 83, it's threatening to go on strike and we are claiming as the employers that that

wording on there valid in fact is a threat to go on strike and therefore in violation of the labour code. So the irony of all this is the question of whether the union had the right to go back to the bargaining table and say we rescind our agreement on the vacation accrual. That little issue didn't get settled for eight months and when it was finally settled, Andy Sims said of course the union had the right to do that and they're not bargaining in bad faith. They had their whole membership behind them; they were being honest and saying we can't get an agreement here. Now it's not the nicest thing that the union did but what it was basically was a negotiating committee having to admit that they made a mistake. In my mind it never was a mistake but the way it all unravelled, people didn't understand. So that little bit of, you know challenge, are they bargaining in bad faith, it disappeared. It was nothing; it was this other half that said, and by the way, when you're thinking about bad faith, think about threat to strike. So we're picketing around the labour relations building; staff and nurses and it's freezing cold and we're saying don't take away our right to vote and that's where the big transfer happened. The hearings were all about whether or not the union could have a strike vote. And what Andy Sims was trying to get, what I think our lawyers had to say was we'll change the wording and we'll say you know, do you like the employer's last offer without using 'and if you don't, here's what we will do.' Now we had already set the date for the strike vote and the date was, I don't know the date but I am making this up; the hearing was on a Monday morning. The strike was supposed to be Tuesday or Wednesday. Now you don't just have a strike vote, without a whole lot of preparations. So, for the two weeks before the nurses had been hiring motor homes and offices and wherever they could setting up this vote, handing out information, getting everybody up to speed on what was going on so we were ready to vote on the Tuesday, let's say whatever day it was. We go into the hearing Monday morning and the hearing goes on. They hear a little bit of evidence about bargaining in bad faith about vacation accrual and Sims pushes that off and says we'll deal with that another day and the hearing goes all morning, I mean all afternoon; they were calling in witnesses. I'm sitting there watching. Our lawyers are getting more and more worried about what's coming on and again I am not giving it accurately. I don't remember it exactly but it was like 3'oclock in the morning when Sims brought down his ruling that our wording on that volley was indeed a threat to strike and we were in contradiction or we were in contravention of the labour code and ordered us not to vote. Well it's 3'oclock in the morning; people are already getting up to get the motor homes revved up near the Edmonton General, the Alec, all the rest, all over the province. Now we have a new phenomenon that's happened as well is up until 83 the only hospitals that could go on strike were those that were provincial that were run by their own local boards. The provincial hospitals could not. So up to the 82 strike the Foothills never went out. The Glenrose never went out and there's a third one.

I The University.

S The University never went out because it wasn't ours. The Glenrose, The Foothills, there was another one. Because the University never was ours, Edmonton never lost total nursing care, but there was a big hospital, but. Oh the one they closed the Charles Camshell –

I Oh okay.

S Yeah, that was the other one. And Calgary always had this huge great big hospital open. Well after 83 no nurses had the right to strike. So if we were going to go out we were now going to go out against the law and we were taking all the hospitals with us. So this was a much, much bigger deal. So when Andy Sims brought down this order to stop the vote, UNA didn't. We did not contact our local presidents, many of whom we couldn't have reached anyway. They were already in there you know; phoneless; those were the days before cell phones. The nurses coming on for the 7o'clock shift, the polls opened at 6:30, the nurses coming off the late, so we were in full gear. So we voted right across the province and it was like a, I don't know a 98% strike. It was huge. And why were the nurses mad? They were totally ticked because their right to vote had been taken away and that's what started the 1988 strike, was the determination to take there, up until the morning we picketed the labour relations board it was three above, four above, five above the morning we started picketing the LRB it was like minus ten and the day we went on strike on January 22<sup>nd</sup> I think, it went to 40 below and it stayed 40 below. Now the hard thing about the 88's strike was we were out on strike for not having the right to vote, like how do you get somebody back when what got them out, and the issue of vacation accrual on LTD and WCB disappeared totally and suddenly we had all these nurses out on strike and we didn't have the first clue about what they were out on, like because everything else at the bargaining table went relatively smoothly. I mean there were still big outstanding issues, but you never get everything at every bargaining table. So you know you're going to walk away from some tables leaving stuff on it, you know and having to come back the next time. But the truth was the nurses in this province in 88 walked because Andy Sims on the labour relations board told them they couldn't take a strike vote. So I remember Heather Smith was president of the Edmonton General at that time and they had on the front of their windshield "UNA strike vote." Of course it's only two blocks from the labour relations board and they heard that what Andy had said was now if you change it to a membership vote, take the word strike out. So, jokingly. Heather had a big banner put up "membership vote", everybody else said. So we were out on strike in 40 below weather with the Calgary Olympics coming up in February, these nurses totally angry and we had no clue how or what was going to bring them back and then the government. I mean the government had us at that point in my mind that we were out there strong but I mean leaderless in the sense of an issue and then the government started. They started serving us with civil contempt charges, 'cause this was the first time we'd gone on an illegal strike. The started with threatening fines and we went yeah, yeah, fines be damned. Then they said, you know and then they said nurses could go to jail and so one

of our strategies was to tell our ten or twelve thousand nurses at that time you know go down and report to your local police station and ask to be handcuffed. You know if that's the threat, big deal. And then they started getting more serious and they started handing out civil contempt. And the civil contempt charges were to individual nurses and they were very cagey. They went after the nurses in the nursing homes. They were older nurses. They were immigrant nurses. They were nurses that they perceived would break faster than others, and they didn't go after what they considered to be the strongest leaders of all this, which was the hospital nurses. They really went after what used to be Local 124: the Norwood; they went after the Lynwood. They went after some of the rural nurses and started hauling them in for civil contempt charges. They did the same thing in the southern half of the province. So we had lawyers, half in Calgary, half in Edmonton, some in Red Deer, and the court cases started and we were in another building down on 104<sup>th</sup> where there was an LRT station. So we just have all the nurses who were charged with civil contempt; we'd prepare them, bring them in the night before, talk to them and the big issue was what if the judge says to you are you prepared to purge your contempt, and you have to think long and hard about this. We had them come into the lawyers' office and lawyers explained what contempt was and that you could end up in jail. If you say to the judge, no I don't purge my contempt or judge, go to hell or something equally explicit, you're going to, you know find yourself in a cell. And at that point you cannot be contemptuous to the judge. So that point I said to the lawyers. I remember saying this to Sheila and a couple of the other lawyers, you guys get to leave the room now. You've given them the legal advice; we're now going to give them the union advice and lawyers were going well how is that different and what kind of trouble are you going to get in that we are going to have to bail you out of? And I said to the nurses, now you have to search your, now you really have to search your souls. You have to say what is it, what's the biggest threat that would force me to go back to work when I don't want to, when we do not have a collective agreement? What is it that would do that? If you are an immigrant nurse, it may be the threat that they will take away your landed immigrant status; you may be deported. Now that's a very serious threat. If your family and your husband are saying I'm going to divorce you because I don't believe in unions and I think you're pushing it. If you're looking at divorce that's a very serious issue. I said I'll tell you for me, the most difficult decision for me would be if they were to threaten to revoke my passport. Now half of you don't even have passports. But for me the ability to travel internationally is so important that would give me the hard question. So each of you is going to have to search your soul and ask what the question is and then say what will I do. And I said the other thing, and it wasn't just me, Barb Sytkowski, we were all doing this with different groups, I had the group from the north that were on civil contempt. The hard thing to do is, to ask yourself that question and then to respond to the judge. Now you don't have to say to the judge, no I will not go back to work, another way of saying what you want to say is, yes I would be pleased and very happy to go back to work when we get a negotiated collective agreement. Like you haven't said no but you've, so we had them all primed and all down and the court, I mean



we just, the employers were asked to leave the court room, because there were too many people who were be charged that had the right to hear there, yeah we filled the whole court, everybody on charges filled the court room. And the judge, this is hilarious, the judge is sitting there saying, I don't remember her name, I should, she's wonderful, she's in the book, she's a nurse from Lynwood who also worked at the Misericordia --

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S -- Greta, she's an older German nurse and she had nursed the judge's mother when the judge's mother was dying and there was no one on earth like Greta. And she had been charged and the hearing is at 10:30 and Greta isn't there. The place is packed full. Barb Sytkowski and I just said to the security forces that were trying to see who should get in and out just we know who's been charged and who hasn't. We had nurses from Saskatchewan there supporting us. We said you've been charged, you come in, like we were controlling who was in and we were not letting anybody who was the employer, not the, cause we felt people who had been charged had a right to hear the charges, and finally Greta appeared. He held the hearing for ten, fifteen minutes until Greta got there. And he, Greta who, Greta who. -- From Pincher Creek, just before this and it was down in ...-- that's where all the winds blew and all the snow built up and the nurses were totally ticked that their new hospital was being built down there in the ..., it was either Pincher Creek or Blairmore, I can't remember. And they voted to go on strike because they didn't like where the new hospital was. Well now how do you get them back to work, you know? Everybody had a different reason. It wasn't one of these PR, we want the professional responsibility it was all, anyway we're all in court and we wanted everybody, we wanted the judges, we wanted everybody and particularly the media to see who was being called, you know, criminals. But in the meantime while we were preparing all this civil contempt stuff, they hit us with a criminal contempt charge. Now this came from the highest levels. This was Elaine, the minister of labour at the time, Elaine McCoy, from Calgary and the same time in the same courthouse in a different courtroom the first charges of criminal contempt were being heard. And again it was against the union, not against individuals so we didn't have the nurses in there. So the overflow of nurses that didn't fit into the civil contempt court room and at the break in the civil contempt court room, we flooded the criminal contempt court room to look at the criminals. We wanted the judge, because now you got a different judge--this is criminal stuff-- and of course as nurses are flocking back and forth between, they're being interviewed, we got the media, we got all this stuff and we didn't know the outcome of the civil contempt, we had, those cases going on; they were going on in Calgary, they were going on in Edmonton or in Red Deer and different results because they were different groups of people and one of them was like how could these people know that they'd been ordered back to work because the order was posted on a door and in Grande Prairie the door is a mile and a half away. How do you expect them to be able to read that, whereas in another hospital it's in your face? So we had

varying decisions about civil contempt and a number of different amounts of fines came down on individuals. But we had always told them that we would pay the fines, but if any of them had been sent to jail, well the bottom line was to my knowledge, and I only know the Edmonton scene, to my knowledge no judge ever asked a nurse to purge their contempt. Like we never got to the point where they were asked are you, will you go back to work or be in contempt of this court. That never happened but over in criminal it was getting more and more serious and the result of that was we got fined again. The number is out of my mind, but I think it was \$150,000. It was the highest fine that had ever been brought down against a union for an illegal strike. So we, of course, you know appealed the fine and all that stuff. We went to the, we went to Ottawa to the Supreme Court with appeals, we went to the ILO, we went everywhere about this stuff, but we were fined the \$150,000. Now the day that we were fined this, Margaret Ethier said don't pay. Heather Malloy was the secretary-treasurer and she said pay. David was the vice-president and he said pay. So we had two out of three executive officers saying pay and one saying no. Darlene wrote up the cheque. Darlene, Heather Malloy, the secretary-treasurer, and I went downtown; we went up to the wicket to pay the fine at the wicket and the till could not handle that much receipt. We had to get three receipts of 50,000 or whatever. I mean it was hilarious that they are obviously not used to that; their own tills couldn't even absorb that kind of a fine. So we're standing there waiting until they could sort this out. You know, we need a receipt to prove that we have paid this; otherwise there was a further if you don't do that you'll be in contempt of court and a million dollars and or because that's what the employer was asking for was a million dollar fine. As we finished paying the fine and were just about to turn around and in law courts in Edmonton all that wall is mirror, there were 30 cameras outside because they couldn't come in through the wall showing us that we were paying this fine. And this guy came up to us and we thought you know, this is another media guy who snuck in and he said I'm with you, and I think it was another media person and we were prepared to say no comment. He said, look over there, do you see that skinny, little fig tree? And we said yes; he said you see the man hiding, hiding behind the fig tree, and we said yeah. He said he's here to serve you with a second criminal contempt. So he said if you want, I'll walk out with you a different way. We said if they're going to serve us with criminal contempt, I guess they're going to find us. It's not like were invisible. So we walked over and this little guy came out from behind this little fig tree and handed us the second criminal contempt charge and back to court we went again and we still had civil contempt and this went on literally to the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, because we were being approached by the Calgary health people. Like can't you give us nurses to work for the Olympics. The Olympics may have had to close, close down if there were no nursing services or no hospitals open or no emergencies to take care of ski accidents and all of that kind. That was when that crazy flying Eddie and all that stuff was happening. People were worried about needed hospitals and nurses and it went right down to the wire until our negotiating committee finally figured out some deal that we could live with and the majority of the battles at the 88 bargaining table were to

get rid of the employers' concessionary demands. And so basically what we got after all these days of 40 below weather, hell on wheel court cases coming out the ..., individual nurses shaken in their boots, individual nurses being threatened with you know, everything from jail to deportation. The union being charged with criminal contempt and paying 150 and then, in the end we paid over \$400,000 in fines. The end result of this was almost the identical contract that we had before the strike began. And don't ask me whether that two-year thing got in there or not. I think it did, but I don't remember. It was all about staying even. But as you pointed out before, after the 88 strike came 90 when the bank opened and the gold started to flow. So all the pain and suffering that was incurred by the union in 1988 and the solidarity that was shown. Now the solidarity was not just between and amongst UNA members, the unions of Canada literally sent us the money to pay those fines, because all of our strike money was running out and I remember Heather Malloy was asked to go speak to the CLC convention in Vancouver after that and somebody said to her, but where did you put your money? And we knew that one of the things that the employer could do would be to

I        Sequester.

S        Sequester, that was the big problem. The sequestration of assets, 'cause the employer had asked for that. So we had, had meeting and had decided that we would take all of the strike fund, divide it up by the number of locals and members per local and hand out cheques prior to the strike, to each one of the locals and say put this money somewhere and don't put it in an account that says UNA. Put in under your bed; put it in account for your children; like know at the end of all of this we're going to need an accounting of every penny. But don't have it in a UNA account because we don't know how far the sequestration order goes. Does it go to every UNA? So we had the Pincher Creek quilters formed and they had a nice chunk of money there right away and we had some very creative accounts that were opened and that's what was paying strike pay. In the meantime what the union had left in our... was paying the big fines that had to be paid. So when Heather Malloy was approached by the CLC and asked to speak, one of the questions off the floor was yes but what did you do with the rest of your money, and she said we didn't have any other money, and they said no, no it's us, you know, we're union, we're your buddies like where was your other money, like and she said we didn't have it. We've given our strike fund away which was huge; we were running out of strike fund at the local levels. Our accounts had not been sequestered although if we hadn't paid, you know, as Margaret wanted, that was going to be a sequestration that was going to happen. So we figured they're going to get it one way or another so we may as well just pay the thing; anyway we didn't have any more money. We continued to be paid as staff, but we were paid three months in advance and it was possible at the end of three months that was the end of our jobs because the union may have been decertified. That was the next big threat that the employer could bring down on us was to decertify the union and that would be the end of United Nurses of Alberta, which wasn't going to be the end of unionization of nurses. We would

have sprung up again and had to reorganize and a new name and you know, all that stuff which was the big threat there after 88 was decertification. But we, you know, we managed. So the negotiating committee got a contract with very few gains but they got all the concessions off the table and it was only in 90 when we started reaping the huge, huge benefits of the 88 strike and we were in glory in 90 and 92. I mean we were, bargaining was. I mean David Harrigan will never say bargaining is easy but I mean the results are wonderful. And then Ralph Klein started the 93 let's off nurses' stuff. Pain and suffering came back into the picture and bargaining has been bitter battles ever since. Now we've never gone on strike again since 88 but have come close, and have taken strike votes and they haven't stopped us from taking strike votes. So the next time the employer comes and tries to take large chunks out of the collective agreement, which by the way they did two years ago, in 2002-2003. That was a long hard, how many years of bargaining to get that collective agreement and you know, even extended the length of the agreement because it took so long. Bargaining is going to be tough; it's always going to be. But this union has been able to face the government and the governments running out of options of what it can do. Short of putting nurses in jail, short of sequestering all our funds and short of decertifying the union.

I In regard to that, that would get them back to work though.

S That doesn't guarantee that they'll get them back to work and they need nurses. So it's a tough game. It's a tough, tough push all the time. Now somewhere in all that I was a labour relations officer and then I went back to education. So my job has been since 90 to go teach this stuff to nurses because the union started in 1977 and that's a long time ago. And the new work force that's coming in, I mean the average news, the average age of nurses now is what 46, 47, something like that. The nurses who fought these battles, who formed this union, these are the nurses who were paid less than the Safeway cashiers were being paid in 1977. The nurses who have defied the law, the nurses who have walked the picket lines in 40 below weather, the nurses who have been charged with criminal and civil contempt, the nurses who have gone through this battle and created this union and put together a collective agreement that gives nurses 37, 38 dollars an hour, double for overtime, and the money is less important in many ways than the working conditions and their schedules and all of that. The nurses who fought and created that are that group of nurses that are getting up and into—we're looking at retirement stage--and we've got a whole new flank of nurses that walked into nursing thinking this is the way that it's always been. So part of my job in education was always to create that sense of history of just how long and hard this union has had to fight and it frightens me when it took us 20 years of saying to the employer, we will not go to binding arbitration. We will not. you know, have a third party come in and settle our agreements. When young nurses say oh why don't we get a third party to come in, a neutral third party and settle, you know like there isn't the knowledge, there isn't the background. So I think the challenge of the union always is to keep alive

its history and to have nurses to understand the greatest...I think out there they think that what's in their collective agreement this year is there and that the next round of bargaining we'll just add things in, like it's a cup that just keeps getting fuller and they don't understand that at the expiry of a collective agreement the whole thing goes and you start off again with nothing and if you're not strong, you won't even get back what you had and that the employers are going to be coming and ripping pages out one after the other, which is what they tried a number of times in the last few rounds of bargaining and if you don't have the membership out there that is prepared to say we will not accept that one single page be torn out of our collective agreement and in fact we demand more. We demand better, we demand increases, not just in wages but in other important issues in the collective agreement and professional responsibility committee as one. We still have not gotten a strong committee as the Ontario nurses have and we need that. If we don't have that membership out there that is ready to fight up to and including an illegal strike action then that collective agreement is sort of great parole. So that to me that's what my education job was: how do we enforce this collective agreement? How do we make sure that every item in it is fully utilized by the union, fought for, defended, and how in every round of bargaining do we make sure we get exactly what we have plus? And not get into any kind of concessionary regression kinds. Because once you start that it's downhill or once you start saying we could avoid a strike by having a third party the old wise King Solomon comes in. There are no King Solomons in Alberta and if you get a third party that comes in to settle, you know bargaining issues, you've given away the strength of the membership to stand up for themselves and from then on it's the slippery slope to weaker and weaker collective agreements. To me it's a constant education job that's going on out there to teach nurses their own history to strengthen them in their... and to make them realize that their voice and their actions are the ones that are getting them something, not this nebulous UNA office in Edmonton and Heather Smith and David Harrigan. They're not going to get what nurses need if nurses themselves don't know and are able to enunciate and back what their needs are in the current, constant changing healthcare system. Anyway, that's all I know. That's it.

I That's a seamless whole, Trudy.

S Well, it's been fun. Well, I was nervous because I haven't done this, I don't know if you know I've been off sick for 2 ½ years. Do I get them mixed up about--you know judge Bowen did this and.

I You did tell the important –

S But I had to remember which strike was which; people remember.

I That's good.

S And you know, you know the only thing I forgot to say was the day the strike was over in 1988 and the day the nurses went back to work the thermometer went above zero. We always said, even God's against us during the strikes, like we just got. So that's when we got collective agreements that end; now they effectively end the end of –

I March.

S March, yeah.

I Far better.

S Well yeah except the next big strike, it'll happen and we'll get April snowfall or something I don't know like.

I Well the last browned and it dragged on and on and on and it looked like it was going to come to a ... in the middle of winter again, you know.

S Well they agreed to extend to the end of the collective agreement to the end of March after the 83 law. That said that you couldn't go on an illegal strike, because they were so sure we wouldn't do it. They didn't care at that point. They had us over the barrel in January but they lost that and then that was the end of that.

I The date of when things come to head doesn't really drive a lot or didn't in 2003 and 04 because bargaining was so long right with –

S That's right –

I Point of agreement, so it could come at any time in the next year so.

S That's right. But in nurses' minds and I think this is, there are two things I learned about nurses and strike. One is, it's going to be very, very difficult to take a nurse out on a illegal strike before the expiry of a collective agreement because they, there's this professional honouring of an agreement, and the second thing is you never call a strike at a common time for everybody to lay down their tools and walk at the same time the way they can do that with steel or the auto workers or whomever. You have to wait until the change of shift, which is different in different hospitals. So every hospital, every public health and every nursing home, has to set their own time, whether it's a 12-hour shift or an eight-hour shift or whatever because nurses will never leave patients in the middle of a shift. They feel badly enough to walk out at all but if they're going to do it they'll do it when they are ready to go home and have the right to go home and the next one doesn't just doesn't come in. So you always have to time it and I learnt that because I've, we did some in the early days, call it at a certain time and it created chaos, so there just little. But I mean during all, especially during the 88 strike I

remember clearly we had death threats. The firefighters' union, the off-duty firefighters used to come and stand at the elevator doors and protect; we hired a protection security guard, who unfortunately was about 90 and slept most of the day. But the firefighters came down voluntarily because we had death threats against the union from people whose families were denied you know surgery that was needed and the irony about it is, is that throughout all the strike history of UNA we have always provided emergency workers. We've always had accessible to the employer full groups of emergency nurses to come in to deal with the emergency and leave right away. We always had that at every local. And in one of the strikes, I don't remember if it was 80 or 82 the neo natal ICU at the Alec, we offered to teach all the management nurses how to handle those preemie babies and they refused to come to class to learn and our second option was we will leave all our NICU nurses in at the Alec to deal with preemies. However you will not pay them; you will pay the equivalent amount to the union because we don't want them to be taxed, you know and so whatever money would come to the union and the Alec refused to have our nurses stay in and the headlines, the morning of the strike was 'UNA kill babies' because they were airlifting some of those babies out of the Alec to Saskatoon and they focused on the ones that were Native and you know, it was all a big publicity stunt and we could not get the message out that we had already offered to leave our nurses in. But they wanted to use it for publicity; so the battle of the publicity thing is you know is always a tough one. They'll do it every time but UNA has been very, very careful to make sure that any emergency particularly in 88 when we closed down everything, but since 88 the University is now become part of UNA and all of the health units are now part of UNA. So and you know a vast number of nursing homes, so should UNA call another illegal strike I mean we would shut down the province in a way that would make 88 look like nothing and even 88 was paralyzing because we took the provincial hospitals that time for the first time. So you know, another illegal strike by UNA would be a huge and awesome mountain to climb. But that's the only thing workers have when pushed to the limit and told that their collective agreement is going to be, you know, torn apart and shredded, you'll have to take a rollback. And I don't think that this union, I don't know where it's all; I haven't been here for 2 ½ years. I don't know where it's at right now but I know where it's been and I know that these people, these nurses have in fact set the wages for the nurses across the country. Now other nursing unions have been brave and done some hard stuff too like Saskatchewan. But no union, no nurses' union in the country has taken the actions, the brave actions that the UNA membership have in setting terms and conditions. So, so, that's it.

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