

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Sandra Plouffe

Interviewer: Valla McLean

Date: 2019-06-25

**VM:** This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project on June 25, 2019, with Sandra Plouffe in Edmonton, Alberta. This is Valla McLean, university archivist.

**VM:** I will begin by asking you what brought you to the college, what year and why did you want to attend Grant MacEwan Community College?

**SP:** I arrived here September 1972. I came from a small town, Cold Lake [Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake (Medley), Alberta], and I always wanted to go into library work. I didn't want to go to university. I didn't want to do four years of academics, so something with two years and the only program I knew was SAIT, and I didn't want to move to SAIT [Calgary]. By coincidence, my mother's co-worker said oh his daughter or his niece is going to Grant MacEwan taking the library technology program. I thought, oh, this is good. So, I inquired. I wrote a letter, got the little booklet, and applied and got in.

**VM:** What interested you in libraries, then you said you had an interest in working in one?

**SP:** I was always a reader, but I worked in my local library in Cold Lake. I think the thing that made me interested in libraries was helping somebody find something—specifically, a book on sailing ships.

**VM:** [Laughter]

**SP:** You know I can still remember it and the satisfaction I got with helping someone, so that's why. When I went for my interview, I don't know if there was actually an interview. Still, somehow the instructor, Marilyn Newman at the time, no Tony Fell, she said why

do you want to, and I mentioned that, and she said good because if you said you like books, we don't like that [laughter] because you are reading books all the time you are not helping people find information.

**VM:** So, there was a service aspect you were drawn to about working in a library.

**SP:** Yes, and definitely books.

**VM:** [laughter].

**VM:** Which campus did you attend, and can you describe a bit of what it was like, the physical facilities?

**SP:** I attended the Cromdale campus, which was the old Safeway store. As I say, I came from a small town. I came with my family to find a place to live, and I was with two girlfriends, one who was going to the U of A, one was going to MacEwan at the Assumption campus, and myself. So, two people on the Southside one person going to the Northside. I remember taking that number 5 bus all the way from the Southside, well Ritchie bus, so that was a long way to go. Cromdale was a new experience.

**VM:** Do you remember anything specific that stands out? You mentioned it was a converted Safeway building. It was not set up like your traditional school.

**SP:** No, they converted it, but you could tell it was sorted of converted. I mean you couldn't tell it was a Safeway store, but it had divided you know they just put in.

**VM:** Not solid walls. Just dividers to set up the different rooms.

**SP:** Yes.

**VM:** What were some of your favourite courses, and why?

**SP:** Trying to remember back from some 40 some years - I liked my library courses. I was just happy to be taking library stuff, but I did write down one of my instructors - I don't know the name of it. It was contemporary Canadian issues, something like that. The instructor was George Melnyk. I think George Melnyk is the editor of NeWest Press.

**VM:** Okay.

**SP:** He really initiated an interest in current events and women's studies and all these current topics. He was very good. He was very enlightening.

**VM:** Were there any other instructors that were your favourites?

**SP:** Bob Christie taught me AV techniques. That was fun. You get to try out making signs and using all this stuff, which of course we don't use anymore because we just have the computer and press the button but using inks and oh things that we don't even use at all anymore. I did like the children's literature course.

**VM:** What about any on-campus activities? Did you participate in any of those as a student?

**SP:** I didn't. Getting from one end of the city to the other. Doing homework, assignments it was a small campus. It wasn't on my radar to join in. I think the campus that might have had the extracurricular activities was the downtown one, and that just meant another bus ride.

**VM:** When you look back at attending the college, what are some of your best experiences or memories as a student?

**SP:** The friends that I met in the program, especially one who lived beside me in the neighbourhood of Ritchie. We would take the bus together. The friendships, the knowledge I gained about libraries.

**VM:** You decide to come work for Grant MacEwan Community College. Did you do that right out of school? Or how did you end up coming to work at Grant MacEwan Community College?

**SP:** I graduated, and I had many great jobs. I worked at the Alberta Vocational Centre, which is now NorQuest. I worked in Ottawa at the Canadian Conservation Institute, part of the Department of Canadian Heritage. I worked at Newman Theological College. The location of that was where the new Anthony Henday overpass was going to go. The college was shutting down. I think I knew that my job was maybe going to end or change, and my boss gave me the advertisement for the job at MacEwan. So, when your boss gives you an advertisement for a job you take up on that.

**VM:** What positions or jobs have you held while at MacEwan?

**SP:** I started here in 2007 at the South Campus in the library as a circulation assistant. I've kept the circulation assistant job for 12 years. I moved from South Campus to City Centre in 2014.

**VM:** So, you graduate in the [19]70s but don't come back to us as a worker until 2007.

**SP:** No, no, no. I moved away from Edmonton for 18 years [1978-1996], so MacEwan really changed since.

**VM:** [laughter]. The campus you've worked at primarily has been the City Centre -

**SP:** Well, no, seven years at South Campus, and I really enjoyed that. The job that I applied for was at South Campus, which was close to where I lived. It was very convenient for hours and the drive.

**VM:** What do you remember most about campus life? A big shift, as you mention from being a student in the [19]70s and coming to MacEwan in 2007. What were some of the biggest changes that you remember when you started?

**SP:** Working? Well, it was completely different; the campuses were different. I'd been away from Edmonton for all those years. I really did like that small campus feel of the campuses. I miss that -

**VM:** Of South Campus.

**SP:** Yes.

**VM:** That changes when you come to City Centre.

**SP:** Yes, yes, it does.

**VM:** What are some of the memorable or significant events that you remember since you've been back at MacEwan.

**SP:** Working at MacEwan? Well, at South Campus, all the people I worked within the library and the community of South Campus because you were a smaller campus, you knew all the students, you knew all the instructors. We used to have a Christmas party with Randy Duncan deep-frying a turkey and all the staff participating with hats, costumes. It was a very friendly place to work. It really was.

**VM:** Looking back at perhaps both as your time as a student, but also when you come back to work for MacEwan, what are some of the things you are most proud of?

**SP:** I would say working in this field all the jobs that I got were wonderful jobs and great people, great experiences. To have that diploma was a great asset and a great part of my life.

**VM:** Can you describe one or two of your favourite memories of working at South Campus or since you've come to City Centre?

**SP:** I think especially at South Campus, the people that I met. Marge Gray, Katherine Koch, Karen Hering, all the wonderful people that had a love of MacEwan and a love of students and a love of learning. It was a great environment to work in.

**VM:** The last thing I'll ask you - are there any memories or things that you want to share with me. Answer any questions that I perhaps have failed to ask you?

**SP:** No, I think I've got it all. I will mention the two instructors that I had, Marilyn Newman or Neuman and Lesley Aiken, because they started the program. When it started, it was bare-bones; they had to get it off the ground and create courses. I just admire them and am thankful that I was able to be in this program. It really was all I wanted and gave me this wonderful working life [papers shuffling].

**VM:** I think perhaps the last question I will ask you - did you have any interactions with or meet Dr. MacEwan. Do you have any stories to share about MacEwan Day, did you attend any of those sorts of things?

**SP:** Yes, I actually met Dr. MacEwan when he was Lieutenant Governor of the province, and I lived in Cold Lake. He was actually the speaker at my graduating class, so MacEwan really means a lot to me. He was just this wonderful person and the stories about him that I've heard. I also met his daughter Heather Foran, and she is a wonderful person too. I met her at MacEwan Days. I was really happy that MacEwan celebrated MacEwan days, and I wish they would continue. I am so glad that there's Heather's Garden as a way of celebrating her and the legacy of her father. I like going there. I was just so impressed with her when I met her. She was just so down to earth and so friendly. I wish I'd brought the picture that was taken of her and I. I do hope that MacEwan keeps that connection with Dr. MacEwan

**VM:** Alright. I would like to thank you very much for participating in this project.

**SP:** Thank you, Valla. I was happy to do so.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Valla McLean, 2019-10-23

Final edit by: Sandra Plouffe, 2020-05-08