

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Brenda Service

Interviewer: Valla McLean

Date: 2019-05-22

VM: This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project on May 22, 2019, with Brenda Service in Edmonton, Alberta. This is Valla McLean, university archivist. I'm going to begin by asking you what did you study at the college and when?

BS: I studied in 1985 to [19]86. I was in the Dance program, and then from [19]86 to [19]87, I was in the Legal Secretary program.

VM: And what made you want to study at Grant MacEwan Community College?

BS: I wanted to experience small classes. I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do, and at that point in time, I was very involved with dance, and they had the Dance program, so I thought that I would give that a try. It just evolved from there.

VM: Which campus were you at, and can you describe some of the facilities of the campus?

BS: The first campus I was at - Jasper Place, the orange building, which I understand last year was actually retired. I was in the basement most of the time. That's where the dance studios were. It was exciting. It was a lot of fun. It was intimidating going to college from high school. It was a very small class, not very many people. I don't think there were more than twenty people in the class, but we had great instructors, so it was fantastic. Then the following fall semester, I decided to take the Legal Secretary program, and I went to Seventh Street Plaza, which was very different because it was in a high rise. It was also a very small class with great teachers. It was a great experience. I made a lot of friends. And I actually got a great career out of that education.

VM: What were some of your first impressions of the community college? You talked about intimidating, but were there others that stood out when you started?

BS: Well, I think yes, intimidating was the very first part, but it actually was very welcoming. The teachers, the instructors - they were great; they were very supportive. Getting into the programs we had to do testing, and I believe that still has to happen now, so the Registrar's Office was very helpful in that respect. And the communication was very good, letting you know well in advance if you were accepted or not. Yes. It was just overall a very good experience.

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

BS: When I was in the Dance program, ballet was my favourite, and anatomy too. I didn't realize I was going to have to take an anatomy course, but it was great. I enjoyed it. Then I decided after dancing for seven hours a day that that just wasn't quite what I wanted to do.

VM: What about some of your favourite instructors?

BS: I had a great ballet instructor when I was in the Dance program, but in the Legal Secretary program I had an instructor, her name was Linda Bose, and she was amazing. I'm not sure if she was the head of the program or not. She was wonderful because she brought industry experience. She was very relevant to the position, and she made the course material very relevant.

VM: Did you have time to participate in any on-campus activities?

BS: No, and I think because when I attended, the campuses were very isolated. It's not like now where it's one large campus, and there are many activities. When I did attend the Dance program, we did a lot of performing, and so I guess that was our extra activity. But when I was downtown, not at all.

VM: And when you look back at your time at the community college, what were some of the best experiences that you take away?

BS: I think friendships. My best friend, currently, we actually went to school together there. Also, it was just such a welcoming experience, so that part was really great. And the education that I got out of it, it has served me very well in my career currently. It's been fantastic in that respect.

VM: And some of your proudest achievements during the time at the college?

BS: Graduating? [Laughs]. I was the first person in my family to graduate from college, so I think that's probably the biggest highlight for me.

VM: Did you go on to be a dancer, or did you do something with your legal schooling?

BS: I was offered when I was at Grant MacEwan, a scholarship to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. At that time, I had to decide if I wanted to do that, and I decided not to pursue dancing, so I just kept it as a hobby, which was very enjoyable. I did use my Legal Secretary diploma, and worked in a law firm, and I worked in a law firm for quite a few years – a couple different law firms. But then I went to the University of Alberta and worked for in-house counsel in the Industry Liaison Office. My position has evolved over the years. I've been here for twenty-three years. I manage the intellectual property portfolio of the University of Alberta. My education was totally relevant to what I do now.

VM: And it started at Grant MacEwan Community College.

BS: Yes, it did [laughs].

VM: How fantastic [laughs]. Is there something that I failed to ask you that you wanted to share, but I just haven't given you the opportunity to?

BS: I don't think so. I think that the opportunities that came with the result of going to Grant MacEwan have been very good for me. I've been very successful because of that education and very happy with it.

VM: And you got a best friend out of it too.

BS: Yes, I did, which was great, and a great career. Yes, it was wonderful.

VM: I'd like to thank you very much for participating in this project. Thank you.

BS: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Kathy Blasko, 2020-04-24

Reviewed by: Valla McLean, 2020-05-07

Final edit by: Brenda Service, 2020-08-18