

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Gerry Kelly

Interviewer: Valla McLean

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**VM:** This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College oral history project on October 20, 2020, with Gerry Kelly in Victoria, British Columbia, and Valla McLean, university archivist in Edmonton, Alberta. I will begin the interview by asking what year you started at Grant MacEwan Community College and why did you want to become President of the community college?

**GK:** Thanks Valla, in 1981, I was the proud second president of Grant MacEwan Community College. My career aspirations to be a president were for a variety of reasons. My first memorable experience in a community college - Dawson College, in Montreal. I was hired there in the first year [1969] as a Counselling Psychologist. I really began to understand what community colleges were all about - focus on student development but also tied into grassroots community issues and responding to those. If there was a college like this in my little hometown of Port Hope, Ontario, I probably would have enrolled there instead of McGill.

At Dawson - fascinating approach to leadership by our President Paul Gallagher. He was an awe-inspiring gentleman. What he did to start the College was invited all students, all faculty, everybody that had joined to work on committees to decide how the College would actually be organized. Over time things really were different at Dawson as it related to myself; I was voted by people in Student Services to be the Vice President of Student Services; there was no differentiation sometimes, most of the time between students, faculty and administration. I was elected by faculty as President of the Dawson College Faculty union. Lots of little different things my secretary when I was

VP often brought her little baby to work, and when she was out of the office, my job, of course, was to act as a babysitter.

Dawson was an amazing institution. It was a reflection of the late sixties, a time when the student power movements, the hippie subculture, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam war, draft dodgers. Personal freedom at the College in those days ran rampant; some said you could get high just walking through the cafeteria. [Laughter]

I remember our first Convocation was at the old Expo 67 island. To receive your diploma, you could ask anybody it could be your dog, it could be your sister, it could be a friend it could be the President to present you with your diploma. What is interesting, though, is the way that that institution evolved. Things stuck. Even 50 years later, there are so many program innovations and student parity, for example, on every committee in the College.

Because of this innovative experience, I developed an interest in college administration. There was an opportunity I felt to do something different to put into process creative ideas, educational change, and actually focus on students and teaching excellence as the prime reason for the College.

I remember at McGill, when studying psychology, we looked at the founders of organizational behaviour, and a key person was Abraham Maslow. Maslow became absorbed with the impact leaders can have on organizations that help people to grow and take pride in their work and produce outstanding products. Maslow, I recall he said "as a psychologist, I helped individuals, but if I could help make organizations healthy, I could help people en masse."

A similar perspective inspired me to run for Dawson's vice presidency, same at Red Deer College and later Grant MacEwan and Royal Roads University presidencies. I would be in a position to influence an organization to be constructive and healthy. So, this was my motivation to get involved in administration.

**VM:** What were some of your first impressions of Grant MacEwan Community College and the student body when you started?

**GK:** First, let me share how I learned about GMCC. My doctoral studies at the University of Alberta included a classmate by the name of Barry Moore. We became very good friends. Barry, along with one of the professors, Gordon MacIntosh, had a bright idea why don't we put into place a community college in Edmonton. I remember when Barry and Gordon met with the Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan. They wanted to name the College after him. MacEwan's smiling response was, "I am not sure what a community college is? It's not one of them funny religious places, is it?" [Laughter] Grant MacEwan, although he followed no particular religion, he was a profoundly spiritual person and believed there was a creator of all things big and small. His mission on earth was to simply "leave the vineyard better than I found it." A famous expression that people remember about MacEwan.

I felt honoured to be a friend and admirer of this amazing gentleman. He was always upbeat and loved to visit his College. MacEwan portrayed a humble but genuine and fun-loving aura about him. I always felt I was graced to be in the presence of a truly remarkable human being. I put into place in the early [19]80s a Grant MacEwan Day each year to honour our beloved namesake. What was interesting though, of course, is that the frugal MacEwan, coming up to Edmonton from Calgary – he always took the

bus and always stayed at the YMCA. MacEwan said, "that's how I meet the most interesting people." Each MacEwan Day though was hi-lighted by one of his impromptu but impassioned speeches usually dealing with the environmental. I recall one speech in particular that I think many people who were there at MacEwan at the time would remember was the speech about 'The Death of the last Carrier Pidgeon'. It is something, as I say, will be in people's minds forever. All of his speeches, by the way, were recorded and are in the Grant MacEwan Archives.

MacEwan particularly enjoyed chatting with students. He would walk along the hallway, and it would take him an hour to get from one end to the other because he always got students to talk to him. I remember one student asking him, "what kind of computer do you use to write your books"? MacEwan's daughter was with him, and she replied, "Oh, my father uses a 1948 Underwood typewriter". Asked how he corrects mistakes? She said, "Oh, what he puts down on paper first, is final copy!" [Laughter] Fortunately, with the help of Dorothy Gray, who was a faculty member, I was lucky to collect fifty of his books all signed, several with inspirational messages for me, from this brilliant person. All those books are also now in the Harr library.

I might mention too an interesting family connection. Before coming to Grant MacEwan, I met MacEwan when we honoured him at Red Deer College. Ann, my wife, and I picked him up at the bus stop. Of course, he's chatting with Ann on the way to the College, and finally, he said, "I'll bet we're related!" It so happened that Ann's mother was a Grant. Both shared the same family lineage, tracing back to the Hector, a Scottish immigrant ship that landed at Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 1793.

On another occasion, I was delighted to be invited to MacEwan's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in Calgary. I sat with his wife and his daughter; when MacEwan got up to speak, they shuffled right to the edge of their chairs to listen. I mentioned you've must have heard a lot of his speeches? Smiling, Mrs. MacEwan said, "Oh yes, but he makes them up in his mind, just as we sat at the table here. And every speech is different, so we just can't wait to hear from him." Tapes, of course, of all of those speeches I've already mentioned are in the archives.

When I finished my Ph. D., a study of Dawson College Organizational Climate, Ann and I fell in love with the West, and we decided to stay. I was lucky to get the job as Vice President of Red Deer College, and we loved the city, the people that we worked with – the place was a wonderful place to raise two little children.

At Red Deer, I got to know, of course, the President of Grant MacEwan College, John Haar. We had an interesting connection. First of all, MacEwan was modelled after the Ontario colleges, where John Haar had been a president. Colleges that had purposely had no university transfer programs. Coincidentally, John had run continuing education programs way up in Northern Ontario at Elliot Lake, a Uranium mine. It so happened that the manager of the mine was my uncle Mario DeBastiani. Right away, John and I hit it off, and I kept in touch with him over the next decade.

In terms of the presidency, I think it was in the late [19]70s I was offered the job as President of Camosun College in Victoria, but I was just 37 years old, still wet behind the ears, and felt I wasn't ready. Three years later, during which time by the way I took a leave out at the Further Education Staff College in England. I was teaching management development training to college administration and also boards of

governors. Finally, in 1981 when the Presidency at Grant MacEwan became open, I was delighted to land this dream job.

**VM:** What did you see as some of your main objectives when you started at the community college, and how did they evolve over time?

**GK:** When Barry Moore became the Chair of the Board, John Haar and the people he'd hired like Chuck Day, Terry Flannigan, George Naylor, Paul Byrne, and numerous outstanding program chairs, faculty, and support staff, did tremendous work to get the College off the ground. In a community college, it was fundamental that the College be close to the communities it serves. MacEwan's small campuses were spread-out around town. However, by the late [19]70s, MacEwan couldn't keep up with the demand for education in Edmonton because of the small facilities. When I was hired, the Board Chair, Bill Lord, advised me that MacEwan enrollments had plateaued for several years, and the Board expected MacEwan to grow like Calgary's Mount Royal College or Red Deer's College. I agreed wholeheartedly with the challenge.

**VM:** And were staff responsive to that focus?

**GK:** There may have been some who felt we had already reached the pinnacle of success, but yes, by in large, staff were very open to change from the current practice. We had program advisory boards and really sharp program chairs that kept in tune with the market demand, and as a result, the College began to grow dramatically. MacEwan grad follow-up records continued to show impressive job placements. We expanded from a few thousand students when I arrived; new student enrolments started to grow by leaps and bound. The data for enrolment growth, by the way, is in the back of the

book I had Glenn Ruhl put together for us, *Grant MacEwan Community College: The First Two Decades*. Have you seen it?

**VM:** Yes, I have.

**GK:** With ongoing program expansion and many new programs, by the mid [19]80s, we doubled our enrollments and by 1990 had close to 9000 full and part-time students. Everyone from our teaching faculty, program chairs to our public relations, and our Registrar's office did a great job of marketing and promoting Grant MacEwan. Of course, Valla, our best salespeople, were the graduates who were proud of what they had done and what they had experienced at MacEwan. They were pleased to tell their friends about it. It was important to spread the word throughout the community. Often, presidents get credit for what others do. I was mainly the frontman for everybody else, and I loved promoting the College by speaking to various clubs, interviews with newspapers, radio, and TV...all that was a vital part of any president's job.

Dealing with the enrolment growth was a huge issue and a challenge and a whole lot of fun; I might add for Grant MacEwan, so rather than playing continuous catch-up with small campuses, we needed a more futures-oriented vision for the College. The obvious starting point would be for MacEwan to play a key role in revitalizing downtown Edmonton. Downtown was losing a lot of business to all of these new urban malls. I became a charter member of the Downtown Revitalization Committee. We orchestrated support from that business community, CN Rail, the media all kinds of other folks of influence in Edmonton to get the idea of a campus to start to roll.

Key city and provincial government officials were also apprised of what our needs were.

MacEwan ended up being a major catalyst for the rebirth of downtown Edmonton. Construction of this beautiful campus led to the nearby hockey arena, apartment buildings, restaurants, the subway, and particularly opened up development north of the tracks that had closed downtown Edmonton from the North part of the city. It was very interesting times. I remember one funny thing is we'd started to look on the City Centre Campus – how it would be designed and so on and that my friend the Mayor, Jan Reimer agreed with me that we would run the new subway right through the middle of the campus right under the campus so that people could take it in, ride it up, go upstairs to their classrooms. But she couldn't get approval in time, so now the subway is on the north side of the campus.

How did the new campus come about? The first step was to establish a downtown beachhead, and that's what we did when we took over the former Suncor offices, 14 stories in downtown. We moved all of our Business classes into that building. Before we knew it, that building was full, and we still needed a much larger campus. Fortunately, a golfing acquaintance of mine, Lynne Duncan, also was an outstanding Deputy Minister, and she said, well you had better start planning for a new campus.

**VM:** So, after being successful and increasing [coughing] the number of students coming to the campus, you focused on trying to get more physical space?

**GK:** Yes, because of course, as I mentioned each of our campuses Mill Woods, and Cromdale, and Jasper Place, were way too small. And by comparison, Calgary's Mount Royal College had just built a new campus. When we opened Jasper Place, Mount Royal had built a campus that was at least a dozen times larger than the one that we had just built. We began to play leapfrog and lobbying between Edmonton and Calgary



as to who could get the government to build another campus. The funny thing is that that was kind of a tug and war between myself and the President of Mount Royal College. But it worked out just fine.

**VM:** Who did you consider some of the important staff and faculty and other administrators during your time at the community college?

**GK:** Chuck and Barry, many people also come to mind, but for each one that you mention, there are dozens of others who should be remembered as well. So, what I would ask is for anyone listening to this report or reading that they take a look at, *Grant MacEwan Community College: The First Two Decades* book. Everybody at the College received a copy of that, and you can see the names of people who also deserve to be up on the wall of fame at the College. As I look throughout administration and across the College, I was so lucky to work with people like Dennis Larratt, Harry Davis, and Alan Vladicka. They were amongst the best in the business. Dennis is one example of how hard people worked at Grant MacEwan. Dennis, and as I say, like many, many other people, he did the work of at least three people. I think what this reflected was the pioneering Alberta work ethic as well as a pretty intense commitment to the College. I think of people like Andi Pallas and Bruce Vincent and their staff in Plant and Facilities. They were respected and liked by everyone. And our Deans, Liz Dawson, Allen Watson, Paul Otke, and Richard Cooke were outstanding leaders. But it's important to keep in mind the real action in the College revolved around what was happening in the classroom and what was happening in the programs. Our forty-plus program chairs and their dedicated teachers were at the centre of MacEwan's achievements. And I think of chairs like Kay Feehan, Gerri Nakonechny, Tommy Banks, Eva Roach, Andy Blake,

Chuck Lee, Ric Garn, Al McQueen, and so many others whose names, of course, are also in the long-service award listed in the Grant MacEwan book.

Grant MacEwan was all about students. Students came first. So for a student, what MacEwan was all about, of course, was their programs, their great instructors, and of course, their classmates. Easy to overlook sometimes by busy presidents, what happened at the chalk face, the classroom, the program that is the heart and engine of the College.

Let me also add the administrative infrastructure, and I am thinking of the library for example, with JoAnne Kemp and Pat Lloyd, our Registrar's office under Cathryn Heslep, and all of her staff all of our student services-counselling and athletics, under Bob Cowan and John Cruickshank, and public relations and marketing led by Melanie Busby and Dianne Allen. Once again, so many people behind the scenes contributed to MacEwan's success. I should tell you I look back at MacEwan, and I was so fortunate as President to have people in leadership roles who had years of successful experience on the job. Putting this into perspective, when I started at Royal Roads University, my work involved ground-breaking change in higher education. We had excellent staff as well but most of them were really new to their jobs. That transition from Grant MacEwan to Royal Roads both exciting but quite different work environments.

Maybe I could make a brief comment on Board President relationships that are very important to the College and certainly important to the Board and the President. I worked with excellent Boards. Boards were made up of government appointees and elected College members. We worked hard as a board to develop what we called 'boardsmanship' skills. That's what Boards roles should be and how participants on the

Board should function. We had lots of fun relaxing and getting to know one another at some development planning days and Board retreats. We worked as a team, conjuring up creative ideas for the College, and drafting long-term goals. The actual success of the Board and Board development was critical for MacEwan's success, and frankly for the President as well.

There was clear understanding that there was the difference between Board roles and management roles. One other thing I should stress is I'm always reminded of and think of is the roles of the elected members to the Board, the faculty, support staff, and students were actually more complex than those of the regular Board members. Because you are representing a constituency, but you are there also as a Board member looking at the broad picture of the College. It was helpful for the Board to hear what some of the issues, concerns are from their constituency, but they weren't delegates from that constituency told what to do. Their job was to say okay; bringing all that into consideration, I vote now as a regular team Board member. I might add to I mentioned our Plant and Facilities people like Andi Pallas and Bruce Vincent, so I've already touched on that, so I am going to go on to faculty on our Board. For example, Dave Milner, who was not only a faculty Board member, but I think he chaired the association for half of the time I was there. Peter Furstenau and Jack Phelan; students like Marc Tremblay, John Proden, Robin Nering, and Rocky Maddex; all come to mind, as well as support staff, Linda Wood, Denise Germain, and Scott Rutherford they all made tremendous contributions to our Board.

The other thing I would add about Board functioning that's really important is that as all Presidents know that a Board Chair can actually make or break them. Bill Lord, who

hired me, was an excellent chair, a great boss, and a confidant. That person I could talk with and say here is an issue I've got a problem, just a good listener, but a background in working with large organizations and John Ramsey was the same. They were followed by Peter Kossowan and Mary Cameron. The Alberta government approved the new City Centre campus when Peter was Chair, very few people know that, and John was also very helpful to unblock delays caused by a partisan government Minister. Another story in itself. Very important to have an outstanding Board and a working relationship with the Board and the Chair. It was really important especially during stressful situations, sometimes actually during contract negotiations. They all worked out well over time but an ongoing concern I always had about collective bargaining, even though I'd been a Chair of a Faculty Association myself was that you work so hard throughout the year to create a collaborative working climate but that sometimes could be soured when bargaining became politicized, divisive, and lingered long past their best due date.

All the Board members are listed in the *Two Decades* book. Some of the names that come immediately to mind are Bryan O'Donnell, Tony Thibaudeau, Ralph Young, John McGee, Vi Becker, Phyllis Anderson, Fred Singer, John Stephensen, Ted Bosse, and Pat Bentley. I could go on but absolutely wonderful people dedicated to the College.

You asked about the crucial people of my time. Chuck Day and certainly the other early hires by John Haar were fantastic. Chuck and I complimented each other. I was somewhat outgoing and a full steam ahead guy, while Chuck was more reserved. There was a good balance between the two of us, and I think that's important. Barry Snowden was an outstanding VP, who masterminded the construction of the City Centre Campus.

He had a background in building Athabasca University as well as Lethbridge University. Boy, was it ever important to have him onside with us.

**GK:** Are you still there?

**VM:** I am, yes. Sorry. [Laughter]

**GK:** This is a pause.

**VM:** [Laughter] Okay, we will move to the next question then?

**GK:** Yes.

**VM:** I wanted to talk about some of the staff events you attended or any memorable events from the community college years. Anything that stands out.

**GK:** Something that stands out is how we actually got the City Centre Campus built. How we gained support of CN Rail, the business community, local media, and government, namely Premier Don Getty. One memory I have of the Premier. Ann and I were at a New Year's Eve house party. Others were crowded around Getty, so I steered clear. We left the party shortly after midnight. It was about 30 below. We were sitting in the car, like the good old days, warming up the car. All of a sudden the car door flew open, who's standing there but Don Getty – you know people took off their shoes in the house, and so on, he was standing there his [stocking] feet, he flung open the door and said, "I missed you inside, but hell or highwater Kelly, I want you to know we will get the downtown MacEwan campus done." What an incredible New Year's resolution! I must say I remember I couldn't sleep for the rest of that night. That was one of the incredible experiences.

I also remember talking to Barry Snowden at an earlier New Year's Eve party bending Barry's ear. He was Vice-President of Athabasca at the time. We were at a friend's house, Ross Paul, who was the VP Academic at Athabasca. Ross and I, by the way, went a long way back because we both taught elementary school in Montreal. I said to Barry, "Look, all we have to do is move the downtown railway tracks that connect Eastern Canada to the West, and we will move those tracks, so then we can build a massive and beautiful new campus." Barry replied, "this is the craziest idea if I ever heard it, it's outrageous and probably would never happen... but I'd just love to be a part of it."

He was the key guy in actually working with the developers, with the architects to bring that campus in \$6,000,000 under budget and six months ahead of schedule. Public Works in Alberta had said we are going to be way over budget, we had underestimated the cost of it, and they figured it was going to be another half a year before we finished it.

A silly thing that happened Ross, and Barry and I had a late downtown dinner to celebrate. The government had announced they were going to purchase the CN rail site for MacEwan. In the middle of winter afterwards, we walked over to perform an unsanctioned sod-turning ceremony in the frozen soil. Not having a shovel, we used a teaspoon. Of course, a few months later, our official sod-turning ceremony took place with a real bronze plated shovel, featuring Dr. Grant MacEwan, Premier Don Getty, John Ramsey, and myself. That's just one of the fascinating memories I have.

[Coughing]

You also had some questions about what kind of activities we were involved in –

**VM:** Yes, staff events.

**GK:** Each year, we went on ski trips often organized by Terry Flannigan and Andi Pallas. A couple of buses were crowded with a mix of college people and some Board members. It was so much fun. I remember people like Julie Lazaruk, a nursing instructor, and her name is escaping me right now, that helped to ran and organize these things.

**VM:** Would it have been JoAnne Kemp?

**GK:** Absolutely. [Laughter] Both Joanne and Julie were very quiet and reserved. And anybody who knows them knows I am joking. You could hear them coming from a block away. On the ski trips, Andi Pallas and Bruce Vincent, along with Joanne and Julie, buried bottles of wine at the top of the ski hill. And those became meet and greet locations. The ski trips were fabulous. I often brought a guitar along on the bus for sing-alongs, I was awful on the guitar, but once your bus is rolling and people are chatting and having fun, nobody cared very much about the fact that I couldn't play the guitar. [Laughter] So yes, MacEwan was also a unique, fun-loving, and productive college. I can tell you for me, MacEwan was the most memorable part of my career.

**VM:** I seem to recall reading about fall barbecues or back to work events. Do you remember any of those?

**GK:** I remember clearly that we always had barbecues. Everybody from the administration to support staff, faculty got involved in serving at the barbecues. It was a great way to get back in touch with the students, meet new students, and so on. I remember two students that stood out in my mind who were very active in the College

and just wonderful people to work with. I mention people like Teresa Azevedo and Sandra Myers. Throughout the year, I met with them. They were the heads of the Students' Association. I met with them and other students and other associations within the College. I always enjoyed it, talking about issues and giving them the heads up, here's some things around the corner. That was a very enjoyable part of my work.

Let me go back to my ongoing desire to help the College become a healthy place for everybody, students, faculty, staff alike. Certainly, there were some hick-ups, but for the most part, I think MacEwan people put their hearts into the College and enjoyed working here. Just before I left MacEwan to join Royal Roads, to my surprise, the presidents of CUPE and the Alberta Federation of Labor invited me to lunch. I hope this language is okay, but I can tell you, given my small-town factory upbringing and my union background in Montreal, I kind of related to gruff union guys. [Laughter] The lunch turned out to be one of the hi-lights of my career.

It may sound strange, we sat down, they led off lunch by saying, "Kelly, we want you to know we think you're a S.O.B." [Laughter] I looked puzzled, and then they carried on, "Look, Gerry, this is the highest compliment that we have ever paid to the boss of an organization. And here's why, for fifteen years you've been at MacEwan, we've tried every trick in the book to unionize your some 800-support staff. But we could never get to first base. If other organizations treated their staff like you do, those S.O.B's would put us all out of business!" [Laughter] I was breathless, and I paused for a second to process what they were saying. I almost felt like crying, but I said thank you, and I couldn't wait to get back to the College to share this S.O.B. award with so many people in administration who had made it possible.



I might also mention that I've been lucky to receive recognition for numerous awards, including – and many of those by the way on behalf of other people, but I'd recently received an honorary doctorate from McGill. I can tell you that as much as I loved that it, it pales in comparison to the S.O.B award. Now that sounds strange, but that's the way it was.

**VM:** [Laughter] You've talked about some of the campuses. Which campus did you start at?

**GK:** I started at the Jasper Place Campus.

**VM:** And then did you eventually move to other campuses?

**GK:** We took over the Seventh Street Plaza, and from that, we led to the developing of the City Centre Campus.

**VM:** That's where your efforts turned to developing the City Centre Campus and making that a purpose-built community college instead of renovating the Seventh Street Plaza.

**GK:** Exactly, that's the best way to put it. Jasper Place was a small but beautiful little campus designed by the architect Dennis Christensen. Christensen got his inspiration from a small college campus in Sondheim, Norway, that I planned and then did visit it later on just to see what that campus was like. I look back probably fifteen to twenty or more years. I visited dozens of colleges and university campuses in Europe in the U.S. and in other places in the world. I was always interested in learning about their innovative programming. How they designed their classrooms. But particularly, I was interested in building architecture. I had a crazy dream that someday I might have a chance to design a campus or have input into a campus design as well.

**VM:** We have a very distinct library with its high arches. I think it looks like a cathedral, and I remember being impressed with those when I came for my job interview. I immediately thought I want to work here! Do you remember how the design concept came about?

**GK:** Absolutely! I'm delighted to hear that you felt that way when you were in the library. I think everybody has a feeling that this is different. You describe the ambiance that I wanted our architects to capture. Inspiration for our library came from a visit I made to Oxford University. It's designed in a sense after the Medieval Bodleian Library at Oxford. I took a lot of pictures of that and other libraries, Oxford, Cambridge and other colleges and many of the older ones had these vaulted ceilings and arches. I was spellbound by the captivating aura exuded by these famous architects. When we hired Barry Johns and Laura O'Neil to begin working on our City Centre Campus, I met with them and I said "Here's some photos I want you to take a look at, and I am asking how you might create a similar atmosphere?" They did a beautiful job. I still walk into the library and I take a deep breath because it still has the same impact on me.

I also wanted to make the teaching and learning process more open to the public. So often the teacher goes into the classroom, closes the door and they are all cloistered in there in one little place. I wanted to demystify classroom learning where a teacher and students usually huddled in a confined space. I talked to the architects and I said "What would you think of designing in the central hallway as you come in under the Douglas clock and turn left could we design it like streetways, mall like hallways with street lamp lights and street side classroom walls that have windows in them? I know some faculty felt it was an intrusion on their classroom sanctity and they pulled the blinds down.

[Coughing] What I did was I asked my custodian friends to put the blinds back up every night. I remember a few weeks later talking to some faculty and I said, "Are you finding those street windows and people seeing into your classroom, does it bother you?"

[Laughter] Most of them were puzzled and they responded, "what are you talking about?" [Laughter] It did open up learning to be a visible activity.

**VM:** What are some of your proudest achievements when you look back at your career at the community college? It must be hard to have just a few.

**GK:** My proudest achievements all related to incredible student success stories. Again, one of MacEwan's greatest strengths was to offer a leg up for people desiring to make improvement in their lives. Wanting to change and wanted to be a better people and wanted to make a contribution to society. Most of my proud experiences related to hearing students about life-changing experience. At Jasper Place, I will mention two or three of them because I think they really portray what the College was all about and what I continue to feel it will be about. Jasper Place I got a kick out of strolling the hallways. It was our 'Fame' campus with its music, design, fashion display, fine arts and dance programs. I recall an incredible life changing story of a new Hungarian immigrant. How this story unfolded. Music students tended to hang out on the campus. They were kind of like rink rats but music campus rats. They hung out on campus at all hours working on their stuff and new projects and jamming. [Coughing] I recall they were astounded to hear a custodian, a lady singing as she scrubbed the floors at night. Do you know this story?

**VM:** No, I don't, actually.

**GK:** Awed at what they heard from the singing floor cleaner, they pleaded with Tommy Banks, the head of the music program, Tommy can you come tonight? It will probably be after midnight but you've got to come and listen to this women sing. Tommy came and right away he said, "this is absolutely incredible". This woman had very limited formal education. She was just learning English but based on her extraordinary talent she was admitted into the program. Do you know after graduation, what her first job was?

**VM:** No, what was it?

**GK:** This ex floor cleaner, her name - Iren Bartok signed on – excuse me I get a little choked up when I try to tell this but it's just so beautiful. She signed up as the understudy for the lead role as Christine in *The Phantom of the Opera*, in London, England. I saw her perform and it was the most incredible experience of my life. I'm told her talent stems from her family lineage tracing back to the famous Hungarian composer, Bartok.

Another success story - *Had a Bad Day*. Do you remember that song?

**VM:** Yes, I do remember it.

**GK:** The singer, writer, is Daniel Powter, and he too graduated from MacEwan. The story goes back to I played football at McGill with his dad. Who later became a doctor in Vernon and skied at Silver Star. One day I was skiing with 17-year-old Daniel, I asked him what are your plans? He said, "well, I guess I'm going to be a doctor like my Dad.... and he seemed okay but you know I really love music too." I'm not sure what his Dad's reaction was going to be, but I suggested he look into MacEwan's music program. The

program had such a great reputation. Tommy Banks brought his best friend up often to Grant MacEwan David Foster to hang out with the students and talk about what it was all about. So, it was a good day for Daniel when he enrolled at MacEwan, eventually leading to that international hit song *Had a Bad Day*.

Valla you asked me to comment on other moments that we had fun. We had a staff hockey team with a mix of people from all areas of the College. With stars like Bill Mucklow, Gene Riel, Peter Furstenau, Paul Byrne and Scott Rutherford, we enjoyed playing shinny hockey once a week and often against the students.

Another memory I have that was that was [Laughter] crazy fun. A wonderful surprise party held on my 50th birthday. A fun-loving teacher in our Early Childhood Program Eva Roach, emerged from a colossal cake about the size of a big desk. She was dressed like Marilyn Monroe and sang her rendition of Happy Birthday Mr. President, initially performed by Monroe for President Kennedy. Eva's husband - eventually we gave him an honorary degree from Royal Roads University. He was an outstanding Ottawa parliamentarian.

Oh yes [Laughter] one embarrassing but I think people will get a chuckle out of this was when our daughter Sarah was about seven years old we were on our way to a MacEwan Convocation held at the Edmonton Concert Hall near the University of Alberta.

**VM:** Okay, yes.

**GK:** Conrad Bain, an Albertan from Lethbridge, and the star of the most popular television sitcom *Different Strokes* was to be honoured at the Convocation. And our

daughter, of course, was his biggest fan. On the way to pick up Bain at the downtown MacDonald Hotel, our muddy station wagon needed a car wash. Sarah was sitting in the very back the third-row seat and I remember she was wearing her beautiful prized blue taffeta dress. Unfortunately, as we went through the car wash good old Dad had left the back window partly open, and darling Sarah got drenched. [Laughter] We were in big trouble at least I was; there was no time to return home, or we would be late to pick up Bain. Driving along Jasper Avenue, thankfully, Bain had a creative wet dress solution. Ann slipped the dress off Sarah, and Bain all along Jasper avenue waived Sarah's flapping dress in the wind out the window. Ten minutes later, we arrived at the Concert Hall, and her dress now was dry, so everything was OK - at least until we got home. When I asked Sarah at home what she thought of the convocation speeches? She said, "Well, Daddy, Mr. Drummond was fantastic, but I thought you were bull and doring. [Laughter] I said, you really mean dull and boring; and my wife Ann chimed in to say- honey, it works either way. [Laughter] Last I saw Conrad Bain, he said he should slip the wet dress episode into a TV program- but the Director would likely reject it as being unbelievable. [Laughter]

**VM:** I always like to wrap up the interview by giving people the opportunity to share [Coughing] anything they would like. I've asked a lot of questions today, but is there anything I haven't given you an opportunity to talk about that you'd like to share?

**GK:** I could tell student success stories until the cow comes home. Let me just conclude that, again there are so many incredible success stories at Grant MacEwan but I recall when I was at Royal Roads an American university president visited me and he wanted

to look at what we were doing for innovative practice. When I mentioned that Colleges like Grant MacEwan they were already doing - Sorry, I just lost my thought here.

**VM:** That's okay.

**GK:** Grant MacEwan was already doing much of what Royal Roads was doing. The community colleges were in so many respects were way ahead of most universities in my recollection in terms of innovation and the way they conducted programs. I remember this university president, this American fellow saying unfortunately, Colleges don't have the recognition and prestige they deserve, except by the many people [whose lives] they've helped change.

My concluding observation regarding MacEwan becoming a university would be this, that I'm really delighted to see MacEwan continues to offer some forty Diploma and Certificate programs along with ten bachelors Degrees. As such, this community college come university is providing a bridge for students who may wish to transition from diplomas to degrees.

As a 'special purpose' University, as I mentioned just a second ago, many of the Royal Roads University innovative cornerstones were in practice for years at Grant MacEwan Community College. And I am thinking of the emphasis on being student-centred, outstanding teaching, small class sizes, admissions factoring in prior learning, outcomes-based curriculum, and the use of program advisory boards. We borrowed all of that from Grant MacEwan. In my opinion, too many Colleges, wanting to gain recognition and acceptance as a 'real University' they tried their darndest to mirror conventional practices, even though some haven't kept pace with change in the very

nature of work and the burgeoning needs of life-long learners. People that need to continue education, need to continue upgrading their skills because the job market is changing so rapidly that what they learned one year is basically short term.

I recall a report that underlies the genesis the development of Royal Roads by the BC Labour Force. Now, this is back in 1994 called 'Training for What' and basically what they said was that "world of work is changing so rapidly due to new technologies and international competition, that the idea of life long jobs are disappearing transient employment is becoming more common. As such, life long learners are making demands on the post secondary systems that they traditionally haven't even tried to meet."

I suspect now that I see the studies that are underway in universities – I am thinking now of the new President at Grant MacEwan that they are planning for the future. I am sure they will take this into consideration.

While we will continue to require a range of universities. We will require traditional universities, I really think community colleges are in the right place and the right time to create much needed alternatives, especially during this time of tumultuous change. Colleges have been forerunners in educational innovation. I mentioned that, for example, at Royal Roads. I am trusting that MacEwan will capitalize on their proven strengths to set new criteria and new standards for post secondary education.

Valla, thank you so much. I appreciate this opportunity to contribute my memoirs to this start up history of Grant MacEwan's community college. I think the work you are doing



is wonderful and its very important that the history of the College be recaptured and recounted as a way of also building into the future.

**VM:** Well thank you very much. I would like to warmly thank you for participating in this project, and I think that's a really positive way to end this interview.

[End of interview]

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