

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Michelle Bezenar

Interviewer: Valla McLean

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VM: This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project on June 18, 2019, with Michelle Bezenar in Edmonton, Alberta. This is Valla McLean, university archivist. What brought you to the college, what year, and why did you want to attend Grant MacEwan Community college?

MB: Well, I came to it in kind of a circuitous route because I was already employed at Grant MacEwan Community College when I decided to take classes. So what brought you to the college, well, I was already here. And what year – I think the first class I took because I took classes part-time while I worked in the library, I'm guessing that my first course might have been in 1985.

VM: So you were working here.

MB: Yes.

VM: But why study the program that you did here at this community college? Was it just simply that sense that you were here and you knew they had a Library Tech[nology]Program?

MB: When I started, I was just shy of my twenty-first birthday. At the time, I was very happy doing the job I was doing for the first three or four years.

VM: Here at MacEwan.

MB: At MacEwan. But as I got older, I started to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I had been asked because I worked in the library, did I attend the program and if not, why didn't I? So after a while, I thought you know what? Maybe I

should just start taking classes. And that's really how it started. I think it was a combination of being there at the time but also my age and where I was at in my life.

VM: Which campus did you attend, and can you describe it?

MB: The first class I took was when I worked at the Cromdale Campus, and the program at that time was there. The first course I took was a Reference Fundamentals or an Introduction to Libraries for Library Technicians, one of the introductory courses. My first class was at Cromdale, but the majority of my classes were then at Seventh Street Campus, and I believe I took the cataloguing course at this campus, at City Centre Campus.

VM: What stands out about the facilities or the physical features of those campuses? What do you remember about Cromdale and Seventh Street?

MB: Oh, my goodness. Well, Cromdale was an old Dominion store, like a Safeway store. The lab itself looked pretty much like our library, a little shabby but small and compact, but did the trick. So that was Cromdale. Seventh Street – of course, we were in a high rise at that time. I don't know what floor the program was on; I think it was on the fourth floor. It was different than Cromdale; it was a little bit more high tech if that's a good way to describe it. And then, of course, the cataloguing course I took here. It was a brand new campus. It was a mixture. I had the beginning, and the middle - the interim, and then the final home of the program here.

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

MB: I loved the Children's Literature course, mainly because I loved the instructor who was teaching. Her name was Anne Anderson, and she was a wonderful instructor. We

did a lot of fun things like puppet shows. I remember I was with a group of fellow students, and we did a puppet show, but we did a rap version – if there was rap back in the late [19]80s – a rap version of The Billy Goats Gruff. I really loved the Children’s Lit. because I could be creative. I also enjoyed the reference classes. We had to do run-around where we were given a list of questions, and then we had to go into various tools in the library technician lab and answer the questions. We had to use almanacs, but we also had to know where to find that information, so it was a bit of a scavenger hunt.

VM: You mentioned Anne Anderson, was one of your –

MB: Anne Anderson, yes.

VM: What made her stand out as a great instructor?

MB: She loved children’s literature and was very excited about it, she was fun, she was very warm, and I really just adored her. I really did. And I should also mention Tony Fell was another instructor that I loved. Tony was not only a wonderful colleague, and if anyone could make cataloguing reasonably interesting, it was Tony. He loved MARC coding; he loved everything about it. He was very excited like Anne was about MARC coding and cataloguing rules, so I was pretty happy with Tony as well.

VM: Did you take part in any on-campus activities while you were a student because you were also working at the same time...

MB: No, I think I just went to classes, and I didn’t participate in anything as a student. No.

VM: When you look back on your time as a student at the community college, what are some of your best experiences that you take away from that time?

MB: I think that I was very fortunate that I was given the opportunity of working at the same place where I went to school. At some point, it was hard to find classes I hadn't taken because there were only so many that they offered at night, so the library was instrumental in getting me through those last few courses. I would take time off, work during the day to attend the classes, and then I would make up the time. I think for me, the best experience was being able to work and go to school at the same place and take what I applied in class directly to the workplace immediately. It wasn't like I had to graduate, find a job. I could go back and say, hey, this is what I've learned.

VM: Why did you decide to work at the community college, though? You don't come to go to school originally; you come here to work in the library. Is that where you begin?

MB: Yes.

VM: So how do you end up in the library, and what year did you start?

MB: I started in September 1982, and for me, it wasn't a job in a library, it was a job. I had been off work for about a year – I'm trying to remember if there was something about the job – I don't know, maybe the fact that it was in a library that appealed to me but looking back, at that point I think I just needed a job.

VM: What positions or jobs have you held during your time?

MB: Oh, my goodness. I was hired as a processing clerk. We were not automated when I started, so the index cards with all the tracings would be typed up. I would be the one

filing the cards in the big, big card catalogue they had in the Millwoods Campus. I typed up spine labels, laminated book jackets. I was a processing clerk. Then I was part of a group - because I was still in technical services at that time - prior to automation - I was with a group of about four or five of us that went to each campus, and we had to barcode all the books. We would take the card catalogue – I'm trying to remember how this worked because we needed to put the top half of the barcode on the book and the bottom half on the index card. We started at Millwoods, then we went to Jasper Place Campus, and then we went to Cromdale. While I was at Cromdale, I really loved the whole atmosphere. It was a small library. At the time, there was kind of an elderly Australian woman – her name was Meg Ward, who was the circulation clerk at the library, and when I was there barcoding the books, I thought this would be a great job in the library. Because in technical services, we were not housed in the library, we were away from the library. So when Meg retired, I applied for her job and so I got the job as the Circulation clerk. At Seventh Street, I was still a circulation clerk; then, when we moved to City Centre, I was the Film and Interlibrary Loan Technician. We used to circulate 16mm films, and I would also get films from NFB [National Film Board], which used to be across the street. I did that for, gosh, I'm not sure how many years – I'm guessing about four or five. After that, I became the Interlibrary Loans and Distance Delivery Library Technician, so that's when I was finally able to get a tech. job. I did that for gosh, a number of years, then moved to reference, and I was the Manager of Reference Desk Support. I was seconded to Alberta College for a while, so I was Manager at Alberta College and came back, and am now Manager of Borrower Services.

VM: You mentioned Millwoods, so it sounds like you've worked at most of our campuses.

MB: Yes.

VM: As somebody that was working at the campuses, you know Millwoods and then Cromdale, did you have a different experience than when you were a student? Did you think anything differently about the facilities at the campuses? You didn't talk about Millwoods, so tell me a bit about Millwoods, what it was like there.

MB: It was a bit like Cromdale, although the size of Millwoods was very different.

VM: Is that the campus you started at?

MB: I started at, so Tech Services was at Millwoods. It was a building. I don't have any strong memories about it. It wasn't like Cromdale, where it was this converted old Dominion store, very small and had portables and everything. It was just a big building.

VM: Was Tech Services for all of the campuses located in one at Millwoods?

MB: Yes.

VM: But it wasn't in the Millwoods library?

MB: No. It was on the same floor, but let's say the library was in the north-west corner on the second floor, the Technical Services Department was maybe in the north-east corner.

VM: That changes. Do you remember when we started to bring Technical Services physically into the library footprint?

MB: After I moved to Seventh Street Campus, Technical Services moved to Cromdale. You might want to check with Vanessa about this, but I don't think that Technical Services was in the library.

VM: So maybe it's not until this campus opens that it all comes together as one.

MB: Yes. It's hurting my brain.

VM: [Laughs]. What do you remember about campus life in general when you started to work at the community college?

MB: Well, I loved Cromdale. Cromdale was a very special place – you really got to know everybody really well. You got to know the students; you got to know the staff, the faculty. I remember that there were two ladies that worked in the cafeteria – this was long before Aramark or any of that – and I just loved them both. Sometimes they would go and sit down and have coffee, and I would go and make myself a sandwich [laughs]. I kind of hesitate saying these things because it's so wrong when you think about health and safety and all of that. But then, they were just having their break, and a student wants to buy a sandwich, and I would ring it in for them. It was a different atmosphere. Even going to the lady's washroom, you say hey Mary, by the way, you have an overdue book. It was a totally different atmosphere. So I loved Cromdale, I really did. The neighbourhood [laughs] not so much, but at that time, it was relatively safe. Seventh Street, I found that it was more isolating because you saw people only in the elevator or if they happened to be in the library, the cafeteria. Because everything was on different floors, you didn't get as much of a community spirit there, just because of

the way it was. And I understand that it was just a means to an end. It was just somewhere to put us until the new campus was built.

VM: What are some of the significant or memorable events that you experienced while working at the college, besides making your own sandwich? Anything else that stands out?

MB: [Laughs]. Many years ago, I used to do the narration for what was then called Media Services. Peter Brown was the head of Media Services, I think it morphed into Instructional Media and Design, and I used to do the narration for them. I narrated nursing videos. I think if there are still videos on spirometry and audiometry in the library that were done by the Nursing program, it might be my voice on there. I also narrated a couple of MacEwan Day videos. I remember meeting Dr. MacEwan a couple of times – any time you could meet or see Dr. MacEwan was a really special occasion. I loved that.

VM: What stands out about Dr. MacEwan that you remember?

MB: Well, I can only think of the title of the book, *Everyone's Grandfather*. There was just something down to earth and humble about him, and he's kind of a magical person. He was. I think being involved with MacEwan Day celebrations, narrating a couple of those videos, and meeting Dr. MacEwan was fun. And of course, the pub and skit nights, President's Fall Welcomes, where everyone is getting together and just enjoying being with each other.

VM: That leads to my next question, which is to describe some of the staff events you've attended.

MB: There was pub and skit night, President's Fall Welcomes...gosh.

VM: Did these happen at all the campuses – at Cromdale? Or did you get together at one campus?

MB: I think it was at one campus, so I think it was usually at Jasper Place Campus. That's where the President's Fall Welcomes were, and in the cafeteria. The other events, of course, were the Long Service Awards. I really enjoyed those, especially when they were at the MacDonald Hotel. You felt like you were really celebrated then, and I enjoyed those, just hanging out with people that you'd worked with for many years in beautiful surroundings. Yes, I enjoyed those as well.

VM: What about some of your proudest achievements during your career here at MacEwan?

MB: I think my proudest achievement is being Manager of Borrower Services. There's something very poetic about that even though I started in Technical Services, it just seemed like coming back to the library into Borrower Services, it seemed fitting for me in that when I decide to retire from MacEwan I'm glad that it will – I hope – still be as Manager of Borrower Services because it just seemed like everything came full circle, in that everything that I worked hard to achieve, and I stuck around through maybe some times that were not that great, that it all got me to that point.

VM: And what year did you become Manager of Borrower Services?

MB: That was in 2017. Yes.

VM: What's your favourite memory or story about working at the college? You've shared some good ones. Do you have any more you can pull out?

MB: Well, I do. Although I don't know, I might want to edit this one out, but I'm going to tell you just because it was very funny. This was at Seventh Street Campus, and the cafeteria there was a man whose name was Frank, who ran the cafeteria, and Frank also worked at an Italian restaurant, and he did some baking. One Valentine's Day, my girlfriends and I found ourselves all single – I might be regretting this, Valla – so I was going to have a celibacy party, a celibacy celebration, and I asked Frank if he'd make me a cake for this occasion. He said certainly, and I asked him to make me a cake that looked like a penis.

VM: [Laughs].

MB: With a big red line because it was supposed to be like a celibacy celebration. So Frank said sure, I'll do that. I didn't really give him any specifications, like how big the cake was or whatever. It was just a small Valentine's Day party. Well, I went to pick it up, and it was huge and very detailed, and I was kind of mortified. He'd had it in a box, fortunately with a lid, but he ended up showing some people, some employees at MacEwan the cake he made for me, and so word spread kind of quickly that Michelle had had this cake made. Anyway, it was still a funny thing because I remember sitting on the bus on the way home and I had this cake on my lap, and I thought to myself, I bet I'm the only one sitting on a bus with a penis cake on my lap [laughs].

VM: [Laughs].

MB: So, anyway, I don't know.

VM: [Laughs].

MB: But – there's probably many more. It was one summer at Cromdale, and it was very quiet in the summer, and we had a big water fight in the hallways. We had those big squirter guns and stuff.

VM: Library employees or everybody?

MB: Everybody at Cromdale. Yes, at Cromdale.

VM: This is the final question. Is there something that I failed to ask you that you wanted to share that I haven't given you the chance to do so?

MB: No, I think that's all.

VM: Okay.

MB: I think that's all.

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

MB: You're most welcome; I'm happy to help.

[End of interview]

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