

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Roman Petryshyn

Interviewer: Valla McLean

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VM: This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project on February 15, 2019, with Roman Petryshyn in Edmonton, Alberta. This is Valla McLean University Archivist. I'd like to begin by asking you how you first became involved with Grant MacEwan Community College and in what year?

RP: I first got involved back in 1986/87. I should explain that prior to that, I was originally from Thunder Bay in Northern Ontario. I married a local lady, Marusia Kucharyshyn, and then, in 1972, we both went for higher studies in England. I'd done a clinical psychology master's degree and then decided to go into sociology race and ethnic relations, so I did a diploma at Manchester University and then went down to Bristol to do a Ph.D. That's where I received an offer from Professor Manoly Lupul, who was in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and was creating a new centre which became the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. The first major research and publishing centre for Ukrainian studies in Canada. There were other centres, for example, the University of Manitoba, in 1963 St. Andrew's College was created by the Ukrainian community where courses are still taught. They're offering a bachelor's degree in Ukrainian Canadian Studies. When I got here, I worked for a while at the U of A and then took a position with Alberta Culture in 1980. Alberta was the first province to have a Ministry of Culture since 1946/47 and now done away with. I'm not sure if it exists any longer, but at the time, this ministry existed, and I got involved in multicultural programming, along with the questions of Quebec's separatism, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and then the passage of the Multicultural Act. The question of how governments should treat Canadian ethnic, racial, and

aboriginal minorities was also on the agenda. I was prepared for that kind of work and took a position as a Northern director for Alberta. So, I worked there for four years or so, and at that point, I felt that there was a need to create an institutional presence for minority groups at colleges and universities. I had the experience of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the U of A, and there are a few other groups that have such participation in Canada. Certainly, some centres and programs, the Chinese community, the Jewish community, Scandinavian communities have been created, but they're not a well-developed presence in post-secondary education in Canada, and so I set out to create some programming at MacEwan. The department paid my wages for a year to do that, and then I was obliged to find other funding sources.

VM: Did you approach MacEwan? Is that how it worked?

RP: Yes. I approached the dean of what was then called Performing, Visual and Communication Arts, PV & CA. There was a dean; he was from Britain. A fellow called Dr. George Naylor, and so I presented some of these ideas to him, and he was very, very supportive. MacEwan at the time was only about fifteen or sixteen years old, and it had been set up on, by the first president Dr. Haar, on a British model of decentralised community colleges with small little campuses on various locations of the city and so on. You know, it was a small institution serving hundreds of people not, thousands, so it was a very welcoming environment. I would say a rather innovative environment, very flexible, very strong relationships, and outreach with the community. You know, people used DACUM [Developing a Curriculum] methods and so on to design courses and projects that appeal to a market in the community. It was a very positive experience. Dr.

Naylor and the president at that time was Dr. Gerry Kelly welcomed the initiative and then let me do what I felt needed to be done without a lot of looking over my shoulder.

VM: Did you pull in other people from the community, as well, to work with you? Or were you, sort of, the person? -

RP: Well, since we have an hour and a half, I'll use it to tell you the full story today [laughter] about what I did first. Certainly, I came with a community development perspective that we had been using in the Alberta government. Having been myself very active in the Ukrainian community and with a number of other communities, and because I was Director at Cultural Heritage for programming, I really had dealt with, sixty or eighty different types of cultural groups in the province. The government at the time had a community advisory council called the Alberta Cultural Heritage Council, and there were representatives from all these communities on this council. For a number of years, I had an opportunity to meet people from a very, very broad range of backgrounds and communities, and I worked with people involved in all kinds of community programming. So, I felt comfortable in coming to MacEwan and setting up a one-man operation called the Office of Multicultural and Native Programming (OMNP).

VM: Ok.

RP: Initially, I launched this sort of dialogue with a variety of communities. Of course, it was easier for me to deal with the Ukrainian community in particular because people knew me, and I knew them more extensively. Shortly, thereafter I saw the possibility of locating some funding and starting some programming with the Ukrainian communities. That's when the idea of the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre first emerged.

What happened was that I worked with the community that set up a committee for this purpose, and with that body, we began to fundraise both inside the Ukrainian community and with the provincial and federal governments. In 1987-88 I was able to find a \$100,000 to launch the idea and test it out. The Ukrainian community committed itself and eventually raised about \$250,000. The first \$100,000 was just to be used as operating. The \$250,000 was the beginning of the endowments process. Having come from the U of A – and with some government background – I understood that these kinds of programs would not be secure unless they had endowment dollars. Our universities are constantly changing, centres and research groups are coming and going, disappearing. There is no guaranteed stability at a university, particularly in Alberta, with the oil prices going up and down over the decades. I had learnt about endowments and the Alberta government matching dollar programs, from having been in government. So, I began an endowment for URDC. My immediate supervisor at the time was Dr. Chuck Day, who was vice-president. They were very accommodating, and in the course of that year, I managed to line up both a federal donation to the endowment of half a million dollars and a \$1.5 million from the Alberta government. So, we had – by the end of the first-year – commitments for about two and a quarter million dollars, which was there to generate revenue to pay for operating costs in the future. This sustainable model was part of what we managed to do. The other part was that, I was operating - what today is called a community university engagement model. In the early years of outreach programming, colleges and universities had advisory councils for each program, but colleges and universities also reached out generally to sectors of society that were experiencing difficulties or were disadvantaged in some way. So, the

idea of these service-learning courses was to respond to particular needs. Of course, MacEwan was very capable of doing that. At the same time - in my mind – I had this larger notion of community university engagement or CUE. I don't know whether people used those acronyms, but anyway, the idea is that CUE as a concept went beyond that initial model of service outreach and so on to seeing community groups as partners in a relationship. The university would bring its structure, its legitimacy, its way of teaching and researching, its library resources, its specialists, and so on to the partnership. A community would bring its resources – financial resources, its cultural expertise, its language expertise, its social networks that communities have of various kinds, to the partnership. As long as there was a relationship, a reciprocity, trust, mutual understanding – I was quite convinced that both sides could win from a partnership. They both would get what they're looking for, although each side has different things that they're looking for. I'll probably say more about this a little later on. The notion I was proposing was that I could bring this expertise of ethnocultural, racial, aboriginal groups to the relationship with MacEwan. If the communities were interested, they responded with different levels of capacity; in different ways, everyone is a unique case. If the university were to name appropriate people to work with them, we could have a symbiotic relationship that would bring the university benefits of endowments, of prestige, of student recruitment. On the other hand, bring to – let's say - ethnic and diasporic groups, aboriginal groups the kind of support that they needed, in the way they needed it delivered to them. It was a matter of trying to work with a concept of partnership between community and university and creating changes in both sides so that they would work together institutionally. This was at the heart of the problem. I

initially worked on this question for twenty-eight years, starting from [19]87 right to June of 2015, when I finally retired. Fascinating work, I loved every moment of it, and I think I'll be able to tell you some of the things that we managed to achieve in the course of this interview.

VM: What roles and responsibilities have you had over time with the URDC? That's a lot of years. You'd probably done many things.

RP: Yes. Well, I would say [laughter] the key role is to provide leadership that this kind of operating framework required to succeed. For example – certainly, one had to know something [papers rustling] about the way these communities are organized. Their values, their structure, their financing, their history, and so on and so forth. Their leaders, their personalities, [papers rustling] the internal conflicts that might exist. That's true about the university as well. You need to know that MacEwan, throughout those thirty years – to my good fortune – was in a state of constant growth. It was thirty years of just expansion, which I think is one of the reasons, this particular idea managed to have some success. I was obliged to know, to have that background, as is anybody working in this field. Trying to work with either Aboriginal groups or ethnic groups or diasporic groups sort of cold turkey, without preparation, is a challenge. Those communities and the university will quickly sense that if you don't have those skills, and they will immediately let it be known. This is a high-risk occupation [laughter]. At any rate, informed leadership is key. Then there is the question of fundraising. It's not common for people in the academic life – or perhaps I should say it was less common in the past, it's more common today – that academics have to know how to raise money. When there was a positive growth and the price of oil was high, and so on, the

opportunities to fundraise were there, and some academics have taken advantage of them. Today, with the nature of the universities [papers rustling] changing into sort of more corporatized structures, there is actually – I would say - an administrative requirement on academics and certainly administrators to be able to generate funds, raise money and be financially accountable. This is much more intensive now than was the case, let's say, thirty years ago. I was involved in creating ideas and in fundraising for them. Then I had to staff projects that were invented or came about through dialogue with the right people. It's needing to find skilled people who could operate in this framework under guidance and so on but operate independently. So, colleges universities are, [papers rustling] an ideal environment to try to look for these kind of people. I'm going to give you a couple of examples, maybe, would that help?

VM: Absolutely.

RP: For example, in order to have the Ukrainian community interact with a college, I needed to identify people who themselves had higher education, who were part and parcel of the community, but could also understand university procedures and policies, financing structures and so on. In order to launch some initial programming, having gone to Dean Naylor in the Faculty of Performing Visual and Communication Arts, I decided to start with programming that satisfied his departmental requirements. So, we're talking about dance, music, theatre, communication – at that time, video – and so on. But to have the Ukrainian community participate, I needed to locate resources and people that could be found to interact with the university. I will give an example. Many people in Alberta know that there are a hundred different Ukrainian dance groups in the province. Alberta is sort of the Canadian capital of dance, and we have some major

groups – I would call them semi-professional – that do international touring, I'll mention Shumka, most people also know Cheremosh or Volya. These are ensembles where young people are very intensively trained, and they're passionate about their art. But in order to deal with MacEwan, I couldn't deal with a hundred different groups. So, there was a need to create an umbrella of some kind of representational group that would speak for this interest, through people who were leaders and met those requirements of engaging with MacEwan. So, I was involved in forming an umbrella group called the Alberta Ukrainian Dance Association. That group continues to exist. It has been self-sustaining for three decades or more, and it was that umbrella group that promoted summer training courses in the dance community in [19]87/88/89 at Jasper Place campus. We summer course for instructors called ALTANETS. Tanets is the word for dance in Ukrainian, Al for Alberta, ALTANETS. These courses drew perhaps three or four dozen instructors or people who wanted to become instructors, to benefit from instruction that MacEwan dance program provided. There is - inside the Ukrainian dance community - a leadership that teaches about Ukrainian dance, its content, style, form, colour, and so on, music, which is not available at MacEwan. On the other hand, MacEwan had ballet, jazz, tap, and with that came knowledge about physiology, about movement, warm-ups, and so on. and so forth. Safety in dance, springing floors, how to construct a dance floor and so on. This was bringing two sets of communities which had their own specialisation, into a new dialogue. Of course, being artists, they quickly found a common language and benefitted from each other's skills. And so, all of a sudden, MacEwan – particularly the Faculty of Performing and Visual and Communication arts – was dialoguing with an ethnic dance community. In fact, we first had courses on

Ukrainian dances, but then we had multicultural dance training, where dance instructors from a whole variety of different cultural groups came together. They all benefitted from MacEwan instruction in terms of the principals of dance and dance teaching for instructors.

So that's one example. Another project that we took on at the time was something called the Bortniansky concertos. I won't say much about it, but he was a very famous composer. His contribution was being celebrated at this time, and a foundation has been created in the Ukrainian Canadian community called the Ukrainian Millennium Foundation. It had to do with the fact that an extremely famous Maestro Kolesnyk from Kyiv Opera, Ukraine, managed to get out of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. This was a rare occurrence, and of course, he fled illegally. He ended up in Canada, and he was promoting opera and Ukrainian choral music and managed to stage several productions with hundreds of performers. It was a very unique historical moment, and Kolesnyk and the Millennium Foundation decided to record Bortniansky's concertos. A project like that was really beyond the scope of volunteers because you had to negotiate with the record company, you had to set up recording facilities for choral productions, fairly complex. The people were willing, but it required some administrative time, and so at URDC, I had two people helping me, and we took on the administration for them. Eventually, we produced a collection of records with a booklet explaining those concertos and why this was significant, and these were distributed across Canada and so on. Again, MacEwan associated itself with the community helped to develop – because it wasn't our project; it was theirs. With our assistance, they succeeded more quickly - let's say - in getting to the public a boxed collection of music that perhaps was less known in North America

than it was in the Soviet Union. I'll say more about the Soviet Union later, about 1991 and the collapse and what that meant for me. At this period, roughly 1987 to 1991, we were concentrating on projects in the arts because of this relationship with Dr. Naylor and his faculty.

VM: And why does it begin with him? Did you know him personally?

RP: Well, no, I did not –

VM: Oh, okay.

RP: I was aware that MacEwan had a business school, it had nursing, and social welfare departments – actually they were together at the time – but coming from Alberta Culture where I dealt with all these ethnic groups a question of performing arts had been a strong feature of what these communities were doing. Almost all the communities were doing something in music and dance. Of course, Aboriginal dance and the Ukrainian dance were different things, and the music is different and so on and so forth. But the dance was there; the music was there, the communication, stage presentation you know, was there. So, I went to the division as we called them, not faculty, and Dr. Naylor was the dean. So that's the person I pitched, and he responded very well very creative, flexible guy – no longer with us – but he certainly is someone that was a significant person for the emergence of everything that I'm talking about. Had he said no, [laughter] everything that I'm saying would have not come to pass, none of these things.

VM: Were you given a physical space or an office at any of the campuses?

RP: Well, Dr. Naylor at first suggested – the only space he had was - the ticket office near the theatre [laughter].

So, if you've been [laughter], you walk in the door to the theatre, and there is a little office to the right. And that was fine. [laughter]. There was room for the two or three of us, depending on what period of time, but for the first half year, the year we worked out of the ticket office. It was empty during the day. [laughter] And then, of course, he made arrangements for a couple of offices – two offices, like a little suite – on the main floor by the back exit and so, we then moved into that space. In terms of facilities - because I know you're interested about the history of that – we stayed there until the new campus opened and was built – I think in about 2000 or so –

VM: This campus here? Yes...1993 actually –

RP: Oh, sorry.

VM: Yes, it's okay. City Centre Campus 1993, yes.

RP: We weren't in the very first move, but we moved from Jasper to the campus and then from the campus over to Alberta College.

VM: Alberta College?

RP: Yes, Alberta College.

VM: 2000 is when we bought Alberta College. So yes –

RP: Right. So, we went into Alberta College and there we had a much more spacious opportunity, we had six working desks and the activity required that much because by

then, things were popping – as I'll describe in a moment. I never moved to - that is to say URDC – never moved to 107th street, a couple of floors –

VM: Yes, 7th Street Plaza –

RP: Right.

VM: We were there for a while.

RP: Right. So, we'd never – I mean, I had meetings there and worked there, of course – but we were never located there. URDC went from Jasper Place to the Centre Campus, then to Alberta College, and then back to the Centre Campus.

VM: Is that where it's situated now?

RP: In 2019 – that's where URDC is located under the provost office at City Centre Campus.

VM: And now it falls under Arts and Science, right? Are you associated with Arts and Science?

RP: You know, one of the features of URDC programming at – then became evident was that – I need to move one past the initial –

VM: That's fine –

RP: Just to give you an idea of – once we started programming in terms of the arts, we began meeting other people at MacEwan, and they began learning informally about who we are and what we're trying to do. And very early on in the 1990s, Dr. Geraldine Nakonechny, who became the dean of nursing, when it was split from the social programs, happened to be an individual who was active in the Ukrainian Canadian

community as well. Although we hadn't met before – but once we got to talking, she quickly understood how I was trying to bring the community into this partnership with MacEwan - and became very helpful. Indeed, she had her own projects that she put forward, which I'll describe maybe a little later. But for the moment, I just want to say that we began to reach beyond Performing and Visual Arts into Nursing and then into Arts and Sciences. To this day, URDC has activities and relationships across the entire university. So, we were never - except for a brief time – put into Arts and Science into one division or one faculty.

VM: Faculty –

RP: Yes. The one time was when for a number of years, David Higgins was dean. I answered to him as the Dean of Arts and Science. But quickly after David moved on, we returned to the understanding with the provost, the vice president academic and the president that URDC needed to work with all – any – faculty that is interested whichever program wants to come forward to do something with Ukraine. The Ukrainian Centre has also worked locally as has been done, for example, as with the sociology department. One of their students has been placed at the Shumka to do some summer research about that organisation as part of their placement of students for practicum, training, and research. So, URDC could work locally on projects with deans or programs. On the other hand, in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and we began working directly, internationally, with Ukraine and other Soviet republics.

VM: Oh, okay.

RP: The Russian republic, for example. In fact, what I need to say at this point to you here - or the people listening to this – is that, although we came in on performing arts - particularly after Ukraine became independent - we began to focus on international projects in keeping both with MacEwan's priorities and the community's priorities. The Ukrainian community has been in Canada a 125, 130 years or so. There have been five major waves of immigration. The first wave back in 1892/93, now has six generations that it has produced. The second has five; the third wave has four generations. And since independence well, even before independence, Ukrainian immigration came in from Poland and Yugoslavia, which also fell apart. The solidarity movement in Poland and a lot of Ukrainians exited Poland and Yugoslavia when they dismembered as multinational states with independent countries emerging. Ukrainians lived in those countries as well and then immigrated here. And then in 1991, again, a major wave of immigration has come. Today probably forty, fifty thousand people have come - since the independence of Ukraine - to Canada and including some to Edmonton and Alberta. So, once independence happened – again, a configuration of elements sort of came into play. MacEwan was in step with a general process in higher education in Canada and stepped up its attempt at recruiting foreign students. Although there is a logic - a line provided about how this helps diversify our student body gives students opportunities to learn and so on, all of which is true to some measure. Really, the driving force behind it was financial. The institution was charging foreign students two times, triple their regular fees, and this became a financial source of revenue for the institution. Not only MacEwan but many institutions in Canada did so, and that's the case to this day. So, the institution had its reasons to begin to emphasize international.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian community had its experiences in Canada with these ways of immigration, and ever since World War I when Ukraine had a couple of years of an independent government – very unsteady and so on – and eventually lost to the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian community had a stream of political interest in seeing independence re-established in Ukraine. There were in the Ukrainian community also people who were pro-Soviet and were not necessarily in favour of independence. As it happened, the Soviet Union collapsed for internal reasons, basically bankrupted itself, ideologically, financially, and so on, and quickly dissolved into fifteen separate countries or republics, of which Ukraine is probably the leading example of one that is choosing to join Europe. The other Soviet Republics [coughing] that is to say, Belarus, the Russian Federation, the Caucasus, the “stans.” In one way or another, they are not seeking or are even in opposition to Europe. But Ukraine was, being on the border of several EU members, Poland, Slovakia, Romania – certainly Western Ukraine more so, Eastern Ukraine perhaps less so. But as a newly emerged country, their decision was to become democratic, first of all independent, democratic, and integrated with Europe economically and politically and culturally. So, the Ukrainian Canadian community quickly realised, in 1991, that they had talked about independence for a hundred years ever since the first war when this happened, of course, multiculturalism remained, but it dropped in priority in our programming, reflecting the community’s interest. That is to say, the Ukrainian community continues to have dance, and music and choral performances, and so on, but the question of helping this new country became paramount. As the director, I realised this was a great opportunity both for the community and the university to open an office in Kyiv, and to get over there, to start

meeting people, and to start working with Ukrainian universities which had an enormous amount of work to do, to bridge the gap between a Soviet education particularly in the social science and humanities and Western universities. So, let me maybe just say a couple of more words about this international programming but then come back to MacEwan. I want to lay the context for you to understand why we pivoted in terms of our focus of our programming at MacEwan and URDC. When the Soviet Union collapsed, everything changed. Central planning, by which the economy had been structured, disappeared, and a market economy emerged. There was enormous economic dislocation, millions of people unemployed, people lost their pensions, the inflation rate was at ten thousand percent. I remember people selling coupons, little things on the street as money, exchanging them for Western Dollars, and so on. More seriously, independence meant that the Soviet Armed Forces had to be restructured, and a loyal Ukrainian armed forces need to be created, Russian armed forces, and Belarusian armed forces and so on. Every republic wanted its own. That was a major transformation. Another major transformation is the idea of a market or capitalistic economy operating in the way it does, that is, to say with banking, with an international currency, with floating, the value of currencies, and so on. Over a Soviet system which everything has been planned by thousands and thousands of bureaucrats: how many light bulbs to produce, how many left shoes, right shoes, on what day and all that. This clearly was a losing idea and impoverished many people, denied them reasonable living, although everybody was more equal than in capitalistic societies. So that problem had to be dealt with. Communist societies had a command economy of a one-party system, dictatorships or totalitarian systems, and so the population doesn't understand

the meaning of democracy in practical terms. So a tremendous educational process had to be carried out to educate people on how parliamentary democracies work and how they can be manipulated and so on. I'm mentioning these things because I just want to give you a flavour of the environment that I was taking MacEwan into, people at MacEwan. I mean, there are certain individuals, faculty members who understood these processes some political science people and sociologists, but the average faculty member in a Canadian undergraduate university in Edmonton doesn't necessarily follow. They are focussed on their profession, on their field, they don't necessarily follow East European events. That's not possible to do. Obviously, people make choices, and we became the kind of in-house expert. You know what an expert is, it's like fifty miles away from home, or, you read the book chapter the night before [laughter] everybody else, you become an expert and so, people began to ask questions. I needed to figure out ways to make it practical for somebody in music, for example, to go to Ukraine. And so, we started with that, and it turned out that our jazz program had an interest in jazz in Ukraine. The Soviets had cottoned on to jazz decades before, and it was quite popular and still is actually. In Ukraine, there is an international jazz festival in Lviv in Western Ukraine every year. So, we sent some instructors who were performers as well, and they attended the jazz festival, and that was the beginning of exchanges. Then we invited a composer from Ukraine by the name of Lesia Dychko, who came. I organised a national conference of Ukrainian Canadian choirs because they didn't meet regularly. They had choirs, locally, across Canada, but nobody every organised a national meeting, and so we organised a national conference, where this composer came and spoke, and people began talking about cooperating more across Canada. We even put

out a couple of issues of a newsletter for them, *Resonance* it was called. So, URDC established international contacts in jazz and choral. It was at this point I decided to work in the field of agricultural exchanges. Now, this may sound a little unusual because MacEwan has no relationship with agriculture, but it really didn't matter because the administration allowed me to form partnerships with other Canadian colleges. In Southern Alberta and the Northeast here, we have agricultural colleges. They joined projects that I managed to set up. You may have heard the name, Soros. He's very often in the news. George Soros is a billionaire who has his own foundations that are committed to promoting democracy in the world. When the Soviet Union came around, he set up a number of his foundations in the new countries of the former Soviet Union. He set up one in Ukraine called the Renaissance Foundation. They were looking for a way to give farmers from Ukraine an opportunity to discover what farming in capitalist societies was like. I should explain. The Soviet Union had no private farmland. People had a big garden, a hundred yards by fifty yards, so they could live off the garden, but there were state farms and collective farms where the majority of agricultural was produced. So instead of a farm family, a state farm was a place that was created on industrial principles. There would be two thousand people living; it would be twenty thousand hectares or maybe even larger, and then there would be an agronomist, a financial person, a person who handled the grains, and other specialities. Anyway, this was an industrial notion of farming that was a complete failure. As a result, people were trapped and totally unproductive on these collectivized farms. Even if they did produce, there was nobody there to distribute the stuff. A third of their crops would rot on the fields. It was a catastrophic policy, and as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, people

with initiative in agriculture started taking marginal pieces of land and privatising it and all the equipment that was sitting on these collective farms unused, such as tractors that were broken, and nobody cared about. Parts were there, but nobody fixed anything. I'm being dramatic here, of course, it wasn't quite like a hundred percent, but the fact is that the let's call it private farming began to re-emerge, which was the case prior to the Revolution of 1917 and prior to communism having created this new kind of unproductive system. Family farmers just spontaneously emerged, and they took equipment, or you know bought equipment from the collective farm, fixed it got it running, and cared about the land that they worked and cared about the sale of their produce. In other words, private farming, family farming works. This is not to say that we don't have big, large corporate farming today, we do, but it works because there is private ownership and that is looking to make a profit on lands, something driving that system. In the Soviet Union, there was nothing driving the kind of model that existed. The Renaissance Foundation was looking for an opportunity to take some of these private farmers, send them abroad to experience what private farming is like. And they found us. I got a call actually from Wall Street [laughter] and Soros, I met him and so on. I went to New York and met him, and he agreed to provide funding for three years for us to bring, in total, a hundred and fifty farmers to Canada. He agreed in pieces; he only gave us year two and three only after he saw year one succeeded. And so, I forget, it was probably, in total something like a half million dollars or so. And so, we brought groups of people into Alberta, and I helped to create an organisation of Alberta farmers, interested in exchanges with Ukraine. This organisation then took these visitors into their homes who lived with these Canadian farmers for nine months. They arrived just

before March when calving starts. Then the spring seeding and then harvesting and they would head home in October, November something like that. They would get food and board and a few dollars paid. But basically, they work to learn for these years. This program touched us here in Alberta, but also Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, and there was a little write up in the *Wallstreet Journal* about our program. These are things that were way beyond what Grant MacEwan College was doing. But the institution – because I didn't have anybody stopping me, in fact, people were encouraging me the institution supported this initiative and so the good name of MacEwan now spread to Ukraine. At this point, we began to look for a program for our business school. URDC opened an office in Kyiv– again – a brand-new initiative with a democratic university in Ukraine that was being recreated. I say recreated because it had been there in the sixteenth, seventeenth century. Under the Soviets, it had been dismantled. That place is called the Mohyla Academy – Kyiv-Mohyla Academy – it's now a national university, and it was started by a small group of faculty, a group of the intelligentsia, academic people in Kyiv, at least one of whom had been in Winnipeg. In earlier times V. Brioukhovetskiy was at the University of Manitoba because of his Ukrainian connection and their program in Slavic studies. There he discovered that North American universities are not run by the ministry top down with everybody appointed by the government. He discovered that universities have a board of governors; they have autonomy, faculty have tenure, courses are tailored to the need of the market. All these principals that operate, which we rarely think about in North America, were a great, big discovery for Professor Brioukhovetskiy, who became the president of the national university of Kyiv-Mohyla University. So, URDC first opened an

office in an apartment with the agricultural project. A fellow that was working with me at that time, Bohdan Chomiak, who now lives in Ukraine and continues to work in agriculture, at that time was over there on one of our projects. He rented us a room in his apartment, and we launched an office, and then we moved from there into Mohyla University itself, which gave us some space on the condition that we renovate it, of course. URDC then had to hire a person from Canada to Ukraine. He, in turn, hired a local person Yuri Konkin who ended up working with me for the next twenty-five years. After a number of years – half a dozen years in Ukraine, he then moved to Canada and worked at MacEwan and just retired in January 2019. So, that was the idea behind the business initiative. I don't know, did you would you want me to continue?

VM: Absolutely. Yes. It's fine.

RP: As I said, I have a very long story.

VM: That's ok.

RP: An hour and a half may not do it, [laughter]. The notion of business education in Ukraine came about as independence happened when many people from all over the world came to Ukraine. One of them was Professor Henryk Sterniczuk from the University of New Brunswick. He was from Poland originally and then taught in the States and then in New Brunswick. He was aware of how business education had been reintroduced into Poland after the Solidarity events a decade earlier. He created a private business school but a non-profit. Initially, it was called an Institute for Privatization, but then eventually, it was called the International Institute of Business, and it exists to this day (IIB). They were looking for partners to set up programming and

one of the ideas that we eventually landed on together, was that we would take MacEwan's two-year business management diploma program and adapt it to the Ukrainian circumstances, teach adults in the evenings and weekends using MacEwan courses and giving the MacEwan diploma along with a Ukrainian diploma – the IIB diploma.

VM: Ok.

RP: So, in this case, initially, we started working on it, people had to meet, and we had to research MacEwan business school. The dean had to understand what this was all about and so on. The people were very willing, and eventually, URDC applied for and received a 1.6-million-dollar donation from CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency. We transferred our diploma program via a team at MacEwan, and a team at IIB, faculty members in different programs, administrators. There is a full report available if anybody wants to read about this particular project. It's called the "Canadian Business Management Program in Ukraine." It was a three-year project during which we managed to translate materials, adapt course outlines, and readings because there were materials available already in Ukrainian and Russian available in Ukraine. So MacEwan and IIB integrated the things, and the program was advertised. Fees were charged, initially at \$2000, and then I think they went up to \$3500, and eventually I think to \$5000 USD. Students came out; in fact, I don't remember exactly, but it was in the dozens. We had as few maybe as fifteen or twenty in some years but as many as thirty-five, forty in these classes. In the first three years, this was all subsidized, but we managed the project in a way that MacEwan was still holding \$150,000 after it was all over. CIDA agreed to leave the funds with us. By using that

money and the fees coming in, the program was self-sustaining with MacEwan's involvement for ten years. We graduated, I would say, about three hundred students with this MacEwan business management diploma. About fifty of them came to Edmonton for practical placements, in banks, hotels, government offices, which is part of the business school's way of teaching the management program. So, all in all, URDC was providing leadership to other faculties, with nursing and the business school. URDC had this office in Ukraine. So in about 1994, it became evident that in order to keep the community involved and to have them help raise money for all of this - it's one thing as a director to invent these ideas or think about nice ideas, but you have to find both the people who have the expertise and the ability and the money to carry them out too. An idea emerged and was realised, to create a registered non-profit society called the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education, (UFCE). We pronounce it 'yufki.' So, that group UFCE was created. I should tell you that, since that day when they were created 1994, they've worked hard, about fifty people have come and gone through this organization. Some people have stayed for many, many years, including me, I've been there from day one right 'till the end. But at this point, we've held something like a banquet every year, fundraising banquet for the past twenty-five years, which is called Kyiv Konnection banquet. MacEwan presidents all have attended. Dr. Saucier's been - we had Gerry, no, President Gerry Kelly had not, because it was after he'd left. But certainly, Dr. Atkinson attended as did Paul Byrne. There's been an opportunity for the university to feed back to the community about what we do. At these banquets, we allow the senior managers of the university to explain their programming, what we're doing, and what it achieves. It sets up a dialogue. This organisation - this UFCE of about

twenty members accumulated experiences and relationships with administrators and faculty at MacEwan. Many people at MacEwan have experienced URDC, have traveled to Ukraine, have returned. I think during my time, we probably had close to two hundred people from Ukraine come to Canada. I'm guessing we probably had at least, I don't know, fifty or sixty Canadian faculty members and administrators have been to Ukraine. There has been an enormous exchange and turned URDC to the international side of things. It did start 1991; your study is up to 1999. Some of these things I've described like the business program, agricultural was done; first, nursing and business started at the same time. Nursing is actually within the 1999 area of your study, so I hope you reach out to Dr. Geraldine Nakonechny, who's retired. She would give you the story of how the nursing faculty is involved because she knows what it was like when they were part of social services, and that eventually split. She would also know the story of her nursing efforts in Ukraine. She was taken on as an advisor by the Canadian Society for International Health. They sought her out. She went to Ukraine, and then we – she and I – joined up forces, and we began to program for nursing in Ukraine, even in the early [19]90s. For example, I'll just mention it briefly one of the projects she undertook was the nursing refresher program. I don't know whether you're familiar with this. When nurses – very often because they're giving birth to kids and so on are away from the profession for five or six years; then they come back. At that point, this nursing refresher program becomes available and useful to them. They've graduated, but that program gives them a chance to refresh. So, there are, I think, something like twenty-four modules. It's usually - I don't know how long – a year or so to do these. So, Dr. Nakonechny took these modules, three thousand five hundred pages of material –

translated them into Ukrainian, dubbed videos that went with them, raised money in the community to pay for this. This was all provided to some thirty or forty nursing schools in Ukraine, in the early [19]90s. So, the nursing people, they all started doing their activity parallel with the Ukrainian Centre and parallel with the music activities. This idea of partnering the community and the university was beginning to take shape. It was beginning to work, because of the circumstances when creating URDC. I did not know that in 1987 the Soviet Union would dissolve. We thought it be there forever. But because we set up a project-oriented centre that was responding to community need, as soon as a major historical event like this happened, URDC simply pivoted and started working internationally, which also suited MacEwan. So, I think there is a lesson there to be learned not just at MacEwan but in higher education generally about the value of having partnerships with ethnic and diasporic groups. I mentioned knowing sixty or eighty different cultures. In my view, Canada is missing a bit by not setting up programs that allow these other groups to have a presence in the university. Now, fortunately, this is happening with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Fortunate in the sense that that commission was structured, the reasons for it are obviously very unfortunate. We're beginning to see growing involvement of Metis and Aboriginal groups, also taking more and more initiative at communicating with leaders of universities and colleges about what it is they need so that their communities can advance. It's sometimes very hard for university bureaucracies to listen. They have their internal dialogue and to really listen to external voices, and to hear them is a very difficult process. But I'm hoping that you're getting the impression that the gap between community and university can be bridged if you know some basic operating principles

that are followed in community and university engagement (CUE). I won't go into all of them today necessarily, but – you know because I'm getting an article ready on this, and I hope it'll get published somewhere.

VM: You've had a very long and successful career. Is there anything that stands out as one of your proudest achievements?

RP: Yes.

VM: You've done so much, but is there anything that you haven't touched on?

RP: You're right, there are some things I'd like to mention and some names I'd like to mention, just for the record. Let me, first of all, say that my particular proudest achievement is developing this concept of or this variant of CUE, community university engagement. That is focusing on ethnic communities and Aboriginal communities so that we learn to work – we, being the university side of the equation, learn to work with them in a way, both domestically and internationally. URDC – at least we've been told so, I remember a fellow coming up from Oregon who, Provost, Janet Patterson-Weir invited to give a talk about community university engagement and when he heard part of my story, he said, "well you've got a gem, a pearl of a story here at MacEwan." I'm not sure that the institution would phrase it quite that way but, at least by facilitating and enabling, perhaps not totally understanding, but getting the right people in the job has demonstrated some success now, so that's the first thing. The second thing – I'm going to name five for you if I may. The second thing for me that is a great success is the ability to demonstrate in practical cases that when building this kind of partnership, you build it inside the university, but you also build it inside the community, in order that they

can connect. I had the opportunity to create the dance association. There's another group I helped to create called the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) and the UFCE group that raises money and so on. They've all been helpful to me in raising money, which is a constant theme in this, I've been describing programming for you, but every step of the way, there had to be money. I will just mention examples briefly at this point. With UFCE's help, we've created two chairs at MacEwan. One is called the Drs. Peter and Doris Kule Chair for Ukrainian Community and International Development and the other is the Chair of International Health. The first is a full time, the second one is a part-time chair and UFCE donors, together with matching funds from the university - because MacEwan has been receiving money from Alberta on occasion to match funds and we've been URDC's been beneficiary of that. Today at MacEwan, there're five major endowments worth just over I would think about nine million dollars. About a third of this includes matching dollars. Annual revenues from that money pays for two and a half positions, so they're sustainable. About a quarter million dollars a year goes on that. Having been able to do that and having had the university's support and Alberta's support and the federal government's support, you know, gives me a sense of satisfaction that I managed to put all that together. Another project of the many, I haven't mentioned them all, the ones I haven't yet mentioned is because they came after 1999 -

VM: That's ok [laughter].

RP: Started in 2008 and went to 2013. Back in the year 2000, I started working with Professor Michael Rodda from the University of Alberta, the Centre of Deafness Studies. He helped reveal to me the world of deafness in Canada and Ukraine. He

traveled with me to Ukraine and quickly saw that the Soviet system was two generations behind the rest of the world. They still were taking children away from parents and putting them in boarding schools. Not that that model wasn't progressive in its day, but I think we've come to understand the weaknesses of the boarding school model when parents are separated from their kids, they're not educating them not involved with their kids and children become very dependent in a state-run boarding school. Their world is very limited only to other deaf children. So that means they generally don't get into higher education. They end up finishing grades six or seven, and that's what the boarding school model produced. That's what I found in Ukraine when I visited with Michael Rodda. But he set up summer camps and involved the parents and brought deaf parents and deaf students from Canada to Ukraine, and it blew me away. Learning Ukrainian – to speak Ukrainian – I mean, if you go to university to learn a second, third, fourth language, you're going to need four, five years to get some fluency. With sign language, within a week, Ukrainian deaf kids and Canadian deaf persons are signing and understanding each other. Now, not perfectly, but it's much better than oral communication. Learning a visual language is much more powerful than learning it through your ears aurally. So, I became a great advocate for deaf society sign language. I helped to create an organisation – again, a community organisation which I'm president of to this day called Canada Ukraine Alliance for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons. That project then opened me up to the whole process of inclusive education. I don't know whether our listeners understand, but the boarding school system in North America and the Western world has diminished since the 1920s/30s/40s, and many have been closed but not all for good reasons. But children today who have disabilities

basically can live at home with their parents with supports of various kind and go to a neighbourhood's school like other kids on a daily basis and come home in the evening. That means that the local school had to transform itself. What I found in Ukraine is that very often, teachers in schools are fearful of children with disabilities. They're fearful because they don't understand where the disability comes from or whether it's spread by a virus. They don't know how to deal with a person who has medication or psychological problems and so on. In North America and Canada, we now are on a different model whereby the school is transformed, and these kids live at home. They come to school and an individual, a personal plan is developed for the child by a committee of parents and professionals. So, the child is tracked, and their educational process is tailored to their capacity. The idea is not to be able to write the grade twelve exam or whatever, not that that's insignificant. I mean, one should have that as well, but the object is to maximise the potential of every child, given his/her disabilities and to get everything you can and for them so that they can do as well as possible. This model, particularly in grade schools and even in higher education, has turned out to be more effective for educating young people than the boarding school model. URDC put together a proposal with a group out of the University of Winnipeg, the Canadian Centre for Disability Studies, and applied for and received \$4.8 million dollars over five years to introduce the inclusive education model to Ukraine. This is the largest project URDC was ever been funded for and the most impactful with the greatest success – I have to say. In a nutshell, what we did is, identified two pilot schools in Ukraine, one in Lviv and one in Crimea, school number one in Crimea and number ninety-five in Lviv. We worked with them intensively, along with twenty observer schools, along with all the parents in

those regions, and with the Ministry of Education of Ukraine. We got to the point where the parents understood that Canadian parents have certain rights and certain programming, and expectations. They became advocates for their children to have the same. The project sent a whole delegation to Alberta from the ministry and universities. Some thirty people came, and we put them through training for several weeks here in Edmonton and in the region. We visited not only in the city but also various country points. The result was that people from the ministry became champions of this idea, passed regulations, wrote new laws, and created a new job category called a teacher assistant. We have the latter here in Alberta, but ours requires minimal training for interested volunteers. In Ukraine, you have to do a degree to be a teacher assistant, and that job now exists. We set this all up in these schools, and this has been launched to the extent that the wife of the previous president Yushchenko and then subsequently the wife of the current president Poroshenko, both became advocates for inclusive education. I was watching the Ukrainian news the other day and I saw Dr. Maryna Poroshenko, who runs her family's foundation and devoted a tremendous amount of money and time in the last three years to promoting this through the ministry. At this stage, there're 8,000 classrooms using inclusive education in Ukraine. They've closed I think 150 boarding schools already and others have been converted into resource centres. Another agency in the government whose job used to be diagnosing children, then labelling them and sending them off to boarding school for the rest of their life and work. For example, they then were trained to be a carpenter, and that was the end of it. That whole structure has been reprofiled, and they no longer mandatorily send kids away. They now are advisors to parents and help parents to keep children at home. It is

a fact that thousands of families in Ukraine give thanks to MacEwan. In the project with Winnipeg, we handled the educational component. Our Winnipeg colleagues handled the civil society that is mobilising the parent's component, and we worked with the Ministry of Education. They worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare. So, there was a division of responsibilities of that five million. Actually, the project was a six million dollar project, if you include our contributions to it so they took half and we took half. That project with its now seven hundred centres to advise parents in Ukraine is really – I suppose the one that I'm proudest of, and it's not because I've done it. This was done by a large number of groups of people, advisors from the community. We had Ukrainian Alberta parents with their disabled kids travel to Ukraine to meet parents and their disabled kids. They were a role model, that we would pay for disabled child and their parents to fly to Ukraine shows the value we put on inclusive education. The medium is the message the impact on these parents was very substantial. Parent education just like in the deaf camps. Those Ukrainian parents realised that the Canadians could communicate with their kids when Ukrainian parents could not because they didn't sign. In Ukraine, every parent had to invent a way of communicating with their child. It's not Scandinavia where parents have to learn it as soon as they give birth to a deaf child, and the law obliges you to learn to sign. In Ukraine, they needed to see these examples and have role models to understand what we're talking about when we say a modern society, a democratic society. I've taken a little more time than I intended –

VM: That's okay. I think, I just wanted to wrap up, this has been a fantastic conversation. Is there anything that I've failed to ask you that you'd wanted to share with us that I haven't given you the chance to?

RP: Yes, there is one thing that I would like to say, as I've emphasised in these remarks. The ability to raise funds was very central to the start up of the centre which led to all these programs locally and internationally, and we have one major family donor who I just want to highlight again. That is Drs. Peter and Doris Kule, who are now ninety-seven years old. They contributed about \$2.0 million dollars to MacEwan. No one else has matched this since and their contribution helped by matches from the Alberta government provided via MacEwan. So, the Kules donated not only to MacEwan. They've donated very substantially to the University of Alberta, to the University of Ottawa, to the Sheptytsky Institutes. Their generosity is described in a book called *Champions of Philanthropy*. They are the theme of that book, and so I just want to recognise them, and also I just want to say in case anyone listens to the very end of this interview sometime in the future that the history of these things, really from 1987 right up to 2015 or 2019 are written up in one piece has been written up. The report is about to be published by Kane Mullen, who holds a master's degree in history from the University of Alberta, Dr. Olenka Bilash, who is a professor in second languages in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and myself. I am an adjunct there. UFCE is publishing its 25th anniversary history, which will be available in case anybody wants it. There are also interviews recorded through the study with – at the U of A – that are available. Information is available on all of this online and through the newsletter of URDC, which is on the website at MacEwan University [papers rustling]. So, there you are. Thank you very much for listening to all of this. I hope this interview proves useful somewhere down the line.

VM: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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