Interview: #0001
Date: 12/6/2011
Location: Vancouver, BC
Interviewee: Ian Mass
Interviewer: Tim Beachy
Present: Marshall Watson, Casey Leung
File Name: ohp_ianmass1.mp3
ohp_ianmass2.mp3

[Begin Tape #1]

TIM BEACHY: [0:00 #1] Alright, so we have Ian Mass, and it is December 6th, 2011 and we are at the United Community Services Coop in Vancouver. So, Ian, nice to have this chance to chat. I've been looking forward to this for a whole bunch of reasons....anyways. Let's start with where you started. Where did you come from?

IAN MASS: I was born and brought up in Windsor Ontario in 1948 and grew up there. Great town to grow up in and a great place to be from.

TIM: Were you in the urban centre? You're an urban guy?

IAN: Yeah. Windsor's a real working class town. My dad worked in the factories and then he was a Postie. Windsor is a suburb of Detroit that just happens to be in Canada and you grow up virtually as an American. Back then there was no Canadian radio or television stations in Windsor, it was all Cleveland and Chicago or Detroit.

TIM: So the Detroit Tigers were your thing?

IAN: My dad and I used to walk across the Ambassador Bridge and walk through the black working class neighbourhood to Tiger Stadium. It was called Briggs Stadium back then. And I used to get in free cause I was a kid and my dad would play a dollar and we would watch a doubleheader with the Yankees from the centre field bleachers.

TIM: So Al Kaline.

IAN: Al Kaline, Harvey Kuenn, Rocky Colavito. All those guys.

TIM: Who later went to Cleveland.

IAN: Actually they got him from Cleveland. it was a big trade they stole Norm Cash from Cleveland too.

TIM: And you saw Roger Maris and...

IAN: Roger Maris hit a ball right out of Briggs Stadium when he played for Boston before he played for New York. He still played for Boston back then. He hit it right over the roof onto Woodward Avenue. [Laughs] There's nothing wrong with my long-term

memory. Short term....[Laughs]

TIM: I was brought up in America so I relate to all these things. And I was a Yankee fan because my older brother was a Yankee fan. That's the only reason. And there weren't Minnesota Twins when I was young.

TIM: So you went to school there?

IAN: Elementary and high school there. And I dropped out of high school in grade twelve. Just didn't want to do it, it was boring as hell. I liked school, the social aspect. But the so-called intellectual aspect was a whole other thing. And I worked in the factories in the summer time— Ford Motor Company—and made the same wage as my uncles who had worked there for twenty-five years. The day I walked in the UAW had a flat wage scale. It didn't matter. But where you got the advantages was in the jobs in the factory. So as a kid you get a crappy job but you make the same salary as everyone else. So somewhat like a mill-town here in BC, you get some money in your jeans and you think, 'Why am I going to school when I can make first class cash in the factories?'

TIM: Well Windsor is not a poor town.

IAN: No. Well, it is sometimes. It's very poor sometimes.

TIM: But the average income has always been high, the unions have been strong in the auto factories...

IAN: Yep.

TIM: And so you dropped out of school?

IAN: Yep.

TIM: What was your reason?

IAN: Money.

TIM: What did you tell your Mom and Dad?

IAN: That I didn't want to go to school anymore. They make you take Latin. [Laughter] I mean why, in god's name, should I be taking Latin.

TIM: For your own good. [Laughs]

IAN: Yeah, for my own good. For my own discipline. [Laughs] And my friends were all doing it. There is a mill-town mentality to it. And nobody in my family—extended family, cousins or anything—had ever graduated high school. In fact my sister, who is younger than me, was the first person in—well I had thirteen aunts and uncles and so who knows how many cousins—and she was the first person to graduate from

high school. [5:00 #1] And the first person to graduate from university in all of that family. My dad came from a farm community outside of Windsor and thats how it was. Many families back then were like that.

TIM: What was your first car?

IAN: It was a Pontiac. A '56 Pontiac Bonneville. My friend and I went to the car lot and it was 50 bucks. He said 'you gotta get this car because its got a great radio and a big back seat.' God knows what you're thinking about back then when you're 16-17 years old. [Laughter] And this thing was a great car. Rode like crazy except I had a turkey roaster in the trunk because when you stopped you had to put it under the oil pan. And the oil ran out of the oil pan and before you started the car again you just put the hood up, pulled it out and just put the oil right back into the engine because it leaked like crazy. And it would cost ten times more to fix the thing--

MARSHALL: So you just get a turkey roaster. [Laughter]

IAN: So you get a turkey roaster. And back then oil was cheap. At Canadian Tire you get a gallon of bulk oil for a buck or something like that. You're always going to lose a bit of oil but this has nothing to do with the oral history of the community social...

TIM: It may. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: And did you drive that to BC?

IAN: No. I grew my hair and I became a hippy.

TIM: And so how long were you out of school.

IAN: Three years.

TIM: And so there was a three year period where you stopped, you went to work, you got a car. Did you move out of the house?

IAN: Oh yeah.

TIM: So you moved out and got your own apartment.

IAN: Yep.

TIM: Then what happened? Why did you decide to go back to school?

IAN: Well there were a couple reasons. One was that I played football. I loved playing football. I played junior football from 18-21 but in the league you cant be over 21 and still play. So there were a couple reasons, one was I loved playing football and the only way I could play..

TIM: We're talking about American football?

IAN: Canadian football. But yeah.

TIM: Not soccer.

IAN: Not soccer. And if I wanted to keep playing I needed to go to university. So I did that. And it was the late 60's I guess—'68 when I went back to university. Well I was 21 so maybe '69. And there was the politicization of what was going on in Vietnam and living close to Detroit my friend and I had set up a house—a refuge house—well not a refuge house, a safe house. And guys would come over from Detroit all the time.

TIM: Dodgers. Draft-dodgers.

IAN: Deserters, dodgers all of that stuff. Most of them didn't stay more than a few nights because they were headed up to Toronto or something like that in the grand old tradition of the underground railroad. Windsor's got a great reputation of taking people in through wars and slavery and things like that. And I got quite politicized and I was quite active in the union and so I got a lefty bend to myself way back then. My parents were both tories weirdly enough and I suspect my lefty bend is more a reaction to the tories and my parents but it stuck as you know.

And so I wanted to go back. I was interested in going back and I knew enough people. You know, in hindsight, the working class nature of growing up is really an impediment to higher education. Unless you experience it, and I'm not saying you didn't, and reflect on it, you don't realize how intimidating higher education is. Because you don't know anybody who has ever gone and you don't have any sense of what you would do there and everybody is from a different class or at least appears to be from a different class. [10:00 #1] So it's not just about going to school, its about breaking a cultural barrier within yourself. And so football was a good way to do that. I kind of went in with this macho… I went in as myself in a bit of a defensive way but at least there was a way in. I don't think I would have gone back otherwise, maybe, who knows. But it would have been intimidating. It still was when I got there.

TIM: And we'll pursue that in a minute but I just wanted to ask you—up to that point in your life, do you recall any particular turning points that were life changing or things that were setting a direction for you that you haven't already mentioned.

IAN: Well the scene in Detroit was quite radical in music, in politics, and…

TIM: And in 1967 Detroit basically burned down.

IAN: Burned down, yes. Exactly. And there was the racism. And so to be part of that—because windsor was certainly part of that—was a turning point. Going to the demonstrations, experiencing the riot, sitting on the banks of the Detroit River and literally being able to watch tanks blow up apartment buildings across the river in neighbourhoods that I used to walk through with my dad to go to Briggs Stadium. It was like 'holy cow, what's going on here?' The Students for a Democratic Society was born

in Michigan, John Sinclair and those folks were there. MC5, Iggy and the Stooges. I mean it was a radical punk place to be back then. And the black music community was getting into it too in different kinds of ways.

TIM: Motown was big.

IAN: And it had moved from its R&B, let's kiss and make love, theme of songs to much more radical Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye kind of stuff. So I guess that time from 16, I guess 1964, to 21, which would be 1971, and being in university and being a part of the union movement through what used to be the UAW in Windsor and people staying at our house, all of that.

TIM: All that stuff.

IAN: I can't say there is a particular moment that did it. Probably if there was a moment... Well there was this friend down the street where I was growing up and just as I was gearing up to leave high school he decided to join the US marines. There were a lot of Canadian kids that joined the American forces. And he tried to talk me into joining and I was really between—I think I was 17—and I was really between being radicalized and owning it and still being a GI Joe kid with comics and Superman and the American John Wayne mentality and playing football and I used to box and you used to have a macho sense of yourself. And a lot of that was part of American culture—North American culture. And so there was a turning point there where I thought as seriously as you do at 17, [Laughter] which is not particularly deep, about maybe joining him. Because you're looking for adventure. And I think a lot of the American deserters were kids like me who...

TIM: Joined for the thrill...

IAN: Joined for the thrill and got caught up in patriotism or their buddy joined up and so they joined up but then they get there and they go 'holy cow, what am I doing here?' And they get themselves out of it. Which is to then flip to today, and the crime of not accepting deserters from America because they volunteer. 'Volunteer.' Give me a break.

TIM: So back to university. What did you want to study when you got there?

IAN: Political Science.

TIM: Aside from playing football.

IAN: Political Science and Communications. [15:00 #1]

TIM: And where was that? Where did you go to school?

IAN: Windsor. University of Windsor. It used to be called Assumption College. It was a Jesuit college. And when they became secular it became the University of Windsor. But

there were still many Jesuit priests and a big American population from the Jesuit high schools around the midwest. So there were a lot of American kids there which helped radicalize it too in many ways.

TIM: Because they were current with American thinking…

IAN: And they were safe there in Canada.

TIM: So you went there, studied…

IAN: Yep.

TIM: Then what happened?

IAN: Then I looked around and thought, 'the only thing in Windsor for me is to trade my blue collar for a white collar but still within the factories,' and I didn't want to do that. So I went traveling. Just in North America. I'd been to Newfoundland once before, did I ever tell you this story?

TIM: I have heard this story.

IAN: Okay so we won't get into it. [Laughter] But the second time I went to Newfoundland I actually had a car. I had a van called Ludwig Van. A friend gave it to me who thought I was more sophisticated than I actually was. And so I drove out to Newfoundland, and then all the way across to Vancouver and down to Mexico. And I read Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, the Hunter Thompson book and thought 'well, let's go to Las Vegas!' [Laughter] My lord, I was the only person who looked even remotely like myself. I was a hippy but, interestingly enough Las Vegas was just like Hunter Thompson said it was. [Laughter] Nobody cared what I looked like as long as I didn't give them any trouble. So I bailed out of there and got back to Windsor in December…

MARSHALL: Of what year?

IAN: This would be '72. And stayed for Christmas and then came to Vancouver. I just thought, 'I gotta get out of here,' and I drove back across the country to Vancouver. I arrived in January.

TIM: Did you have partners at this point?

IAN: Nope, nope.

TIM: So you came to Vancouver and did what?

IAN: Well the story of that is interesting because I had picked up a fairly interesting alcohol and drug habit over the years that was not an addiction but was not going in a direction that it probably needed to go in. So as I drove across the country I made some resolutions to myself. One was to find a job, and it didn't particularly matter to me if it was working in a factory or working in a more professional way. I didn't—well

I'll get to that in a minute. But I was going to straighten things out in my own life and make the best of situations rather than somehow or other making the worst of situations. So I drove across the country on four summer tires in the middle of January but I made it. And I went to a friend's house—actually the only person I knew in Vancouver—an old friend of mine named Bev Porter. And she told me about a job being a street worker that she'd heard of.

So I got there on Monday night—I've told this story many times—I got into town on Monday night sometime in January. I can't remember the exact date. And she told me about this job. I phoned them the next morning—Children's Aid Society—at nine o'clock in the morning. They asked me to come in for an interview at one o'clock and I got hired and started work that night at five o'clock. And not only did I get hired but they had a big OFY grant I think it was back then—Opportunities for Youth grant—and they wanted me, I don't know what they saw in me but they were so impressed... [Laughter]

TIM: You still had your long hair.

IAN: I still had my long hair and most of my stomach was at my chest and so I still had a football and boxing type of build and I came from Windsor and they thought I could take care of myself so they told me [20:00 #1] that my job was to hire ten street workers. I was the supervisor. And I was to design this integrated street work program for youth on Hastings, in Gastown, which was still a growing concern, and on Granville Street. And so I was smart enough to know that I had fallen into, while not exactly a bed of roses, quite an opportunity. And I was single and barely knew anybody and could work an incredibly interesting job for 60-70 hours a week.

TIM: And you got a place somewhere?

IAN: Moved into a co-op house, a collective house, a commune up in Point Grey and met great people through that. I just saw one of those people this weekend. We were talking, because she'd just retired, about how that had happened. [Laughs]

TIM: And so this OFY grant would have been a temporary job in a sense that it was six or nine months or something like that. And you headed up this team and you had some time to get your feet on the ground.

IAN: And we flipped into regular employees of Children's Aid Society somewhere in there. Yeah, and it was... It made perfect sense to me. They wanted to—this was the Children's Aid board of directors—they wanted an integrated set of services for people who were on the street. So my job working with them—and they weren't all my ideas—but was to hire a court worker, someone who was at remand court first thing in the morning, at the first appearance. Because a lot of the youth—and back then at sixteen and over you got charged as an adult—so we had a court worker first thing in the morning getting the younger people off the remand list as they came to do their first appearance, to figure out what was going on. Because a lot of kids came to town

as runaways from up north or just kids who dropped out of school who came down and found themselves broke...

TIM: And the Prime Minister was telling young people to go out and travel across Canada and find your way and get out there and move.

IAN: Right. Okay, and then so the first indication is that you're in court so clearly something is wrong here. So we would go: 'What do you need to either find a job, get settled, or go back to where you came from if it's turned out to be too much?' So we had prevention right at that court level. And we had... one of the board of directors at Children's Aid was a guy named Tony Mears who was a constable and he was quite a progressive guy and he was very much... this very shortly after the Gastown riots and although the police department said they wanted to change direction there were a lot of hard-liners still left in the police department, whistling Bernie Smith and assholes like that.

TIM: We'll take that out. [Laughs]

IAN: Well he's become a legend and I just want it to be known that he was an asshole. A brute. [Laughter] Well if you look up Bernie Smith he was this legend of a guy who ruled East Hastings. Well, if you've got a gun and you feel like the law is you yourself, then you can rule most anything you want and nobody is going to take you on. Anyways, Bernie obviously was an issue we had to deal with as street workers but what we were trying to do was get the police, instead of charging these kids with petty crime, to bring them into what was called 52 Water Street at the time and do a social work intervention. And so there were younger cops who were actually quite progressive and would bring kids in. And we had an emergency service that was open until two o'clock at night.

So we had an office-based outreach—essentially it was outreach because it was down on Water Street and people could come in and it got well known in the community. And then we had street workers out on the streets and in the hotels. We had a street nurse back then. We would work with the hotel owners, we would rent a room from them for an evening and then have a drop-in medical clinic. So there was a whole number of different things we tried. I had ten workers, a couple of aboriginal workers, guys like Nick Puma. I don't know if you knew Nick back then. And other people from the aboriginal community [25:00 #1] who were trying to especially work on Hastings. And so it was neat. It was a neat way of trying to put together something that was totally unknown in Vancouver. And didn't seem to be known much across North America - the whole idea of trying to integrate the services. So yeah. It was great.

TIM: So how long did you work for Children's Aid?

IAN: Well probably about six months because they changed into the Vancouver Resources Board at that point. So I worked for Children's Aid, Vancouver Resources Board, and

then the Ministry because the Resources Board was taken back into the Ministry and I worked about ten years.

TIM: So what year did the Resources Board die? Do you remember? 1980?

IAN: Yeah, somewhere around 1980-81. Something like that. Because that was when I—we're skipping over a whole bunch of stuff—but that was when my wife and I had just had our third child and she wanted to go back to work and when they took the Resources Board into the Ministry I just saw it for what it was. It was bureaucratizing social services; moving from social care to corporate social care or corporate care. And I had done well. I was a team leader at that point. I went from being a street worker and doing that for three years to being a child protection social worker in the downtown east side where I got to know May Gutteridge, Libby Davies, Bruce Eriksen, Karen O'Shannacery.

TIM: Did you get any different education in there?

IAN: No, no. As, most child protection work done in British Columbia, you were a cowboy or a cowgirl. You did what you thought was the right thing. There were very few policy manuals, there was no practice support, especially in the downtown east side because most of the child protection stuff down there was straight old apprehension as opposed to family work. And much of it was around—much of that was the practice all around British Columbia back then. The standards were unheard of, the policies were skimpy, schools of social work were few and far between, and if you got a social work degree the last thing you did was go into child protection, you got into a hospital or something where the work was easier and the pay was better and the hours were...

TIM: And the risk was reduced.

IAN: The risk was very reduced. If somebody dies, it's the doctors fault it's not yours. But in child protection when somebody dies... Although back then there was very little CQI, Continuous Quality Improvement stuff going on. So you just kind of learned it. You learned it through people like Donna Mae McCargar, Pam Glass. These were people who were the matriarchs of the old Children's Aid Society which did have actually a little more of a child protection and family services support. And so they never really got over the Vancouver Resources Board taking over, let alone the government taking over. So us young upstarts, they would put us through the ringer. But if you got on their right side, they were people you could ask questions to and get some real guidance from.

And so the training was really them. It wasn't any training they sent you on because they never sent you to anything, they never had anything. So you learned it from them. Donna Mae was the lawyer at court—she wasn't a lawyer she was a social worker—but you came to court with your apprehension and she grilled you. And the families never had a lawyer either so she grilled them. It was a bizarre situation. Well, it wasn't bizarre when I first got there because it was what it was but now that I look

back on it, you had a social worker being the chief, cook, and bottle washer all at the same time [30:00 #1] in court.

TIM: And you said you did well there.

IAN: Yeah, I became a child protection worker.

TIM: You obviously didn't get rich there. Doing well doesn't mean getting rich. What does it mean to you to do well?

IAN: Well what it meant was that I learned the child protection and social work business. I can't say that I learned it really well, you know it was patchy, but I learned it and I went in the downtown east side and then I went to Kitsilano where I took over more of a mainstream team. And back then the Vancouver Resources Board was again trying to do integrated services at a community level which I thought was a great idea and bought into, quite rightly, bought into it. And then helped create a team in Kitsilano that was an integrated team that went and provided services from cradle to grave. We did long term care at this end. We had social workers and financial people who did long term care. We did child care at this end. We still did child protection and adoption but we also did family service work, we did income assistance work, we had youth and family workers in the two public schools, we had a community services team and it was all wonderful.

There were some rose coloured glasses here but not really blinding ones. It was a very interesting, very wonderful time about trying to create community service teams that truly talked to each other and worked with a political governance that was really a community governance model—it was an elected board and it did well. And I did, I still do, feel like I was a good supervisor, not only believed in the model but was able to have a vision of what that looked like and was able to implement that vision as well as I could over, I guess, the three or four years I was over in Kitsilano.

TIM: Okay. Then what happened? The Resource Board quit and then...

IAN: Yeah the Resource Board quit and then a couple things happened. One is my son died. My dad, my mother, and my son died all within one years time.

TIM: 1980?

IAN: That would be 1989, no, no. Probably closer to '91 or '92, something like that. Yeah, because the Resource Board ended round then and then Vander Zalm came in and was the minister back in '91. He was the minister for...

TIM: '91? '81?

IAN: '81. Sorry. 1981, yes. And I also—I hadn't heard the term, I only heard it later, but there is a set of golden handcuffs that were being slowly put around my wrists and the key was being turned . My wife and I were now into mortgages and kids and

families but the government was into decent pay and pension plans and seniority and those kinds of things, which are all good. I'm not criticizing those, but if it's not what you want to do, to be a bureaucrat in government—because that's what it was. I moved from community development work to being in a bureaucratic government, and I just thought that I needed a break and I needed to get out.

TIM: So a number of things came together. Your time at... well the golden handcuffs weren't comfortable, you had some deaths close by in your family, your wife wanted to go back to work—it must have been time to change.

IAN: It was time to change.

TIM: What did you do?

IAN: I looked after my kids for a year. I thought about what I wanted to do. That was the time when Vander Zalm came in and said government bureaucracy was too big and so that was the privatization—mainly to the non-profits, at least in the urban centers—the privatization of government services.

TIM: This started in 1983?

IAN: Something like that.

TIM: The budget in 1983 was... The solidarity movement happened here in '83 because the budget came down and cut the civil service by twenty-five percent and so you were on your year off during that period. [35:00 #1]

IAN: Yeah. I had missed about three different severance packages. [Laughs]

TIM: Those handcuffs must have looked good. [Laughter]

IAN: Yeah there was a part of me that was proud of that because I thought I made my decision not based on money but on my values but there was another part of me—maybe the Scottish part of me—that went 'Dammit! I could have faked the values if I had known there was twenty-five thousand dollars in the end of it.' Didn't happen.

TIM: So were you engaged in politics at this stage? East side politics in Vancouver were...

IAN: Oh yeah. I was the chairperson of the Hastings Sunrise Action Council. We were deeply, deeply involved in the politics of the east side and COPE. The big campaign back then was that they wanted to build BC Place on the PNE grounds. And so my oldest daughter Kate, as I tell this story, that she and I were both arrested—her first arrest was for civil disobedience in a snuggly on my front at three months old. [Laughter] By Erwin Swanguard. Erwin...

TIM: You were arrested?

IAN: Yeah. Because I wouldn't leave the PNE. We were leafletting against the building of

this huge, great stadium on the Hastings Park site. Not on the PNE site, it's a park. A park. And so he said, 'You're on private property,' and I said [Laughs] 'I'm on a public park.' And he said, 'no you're not, you're on private property,' and so I said, 'phone the cops then, take me away.' So I still have, somewhere in my files, we made the front page headline of the Vancouver Sun—father and three month old arrested along with at least a dozen others. And the arrest was the cops getting us out to the edge of the grounds saying 'you're free to go, don't go back in or we will really arrest you.' [Laughs]

TIM: So you took your time away. And then what?

IAN: Family Services of Greater Vancouver. They took over one of the Project Parent programs and I applied to be the coordinator for that and Barbara Brett, a fantastic leader and a fantastic woman, hired me to work for Family Services of Greater Vancouver. And I worked for them for about ten years. I was a director. There were three of us as directors, myself, Bonnie White and Teri Nicholas. And Barbara was the Executive Director. So we divvied up the programs and it was a great time of expansion for Family Services. They moved from being a small, somewhat elitist west side counseling program to being, I think, still the largest non-profit—other than the community living non-profits—the largest family services non-profit in British Columbia.

TIM: There are some others that are catching up or...

IAN: Probably.

TIM: A very complex organization.

IAN: Yes.

TIM: So that government outsourcing that happened starting '83 and moving on for a number of years after that, Family Services took up a bunch of that outsourced, contracted out work...

IAN: Yes. All kinds.

TIM: Project Parent being one of them.

IAN: Project Parent. And I learned how to write RFP's because we just expanded like crazy back then both with programming and...

TIM: That's the story of a lot of non-profits during that time.

IAN: Yes.

TIM: Did you know what you were doing? [Laughs] I'm speaking from, asking this question out of my own experience.

IAN: You know, I did in some ways because I had been lucky enough to be in growth phases

in all of these jobs and the ones before them so I new what growth looked like. And I had also been lucky enough, even in government—which is one of the reasons I left—to know to take advantage of creative thinking, creative thinking by other people, creative thinking by myself. I was in a job where you can be an entrepreneur, a social entrepreneur, in Family Services. At least what they were doing was social entrepreneurship. [40:00 #1] That term wasn't known back then but back then you looked at it and...

TIM: Barbara was fun to work with...

IAN: Barbara was fun to work with. I had an attitude, and still do to this day, that government doesn't particularly know what they want. They have a general idea of what they want and a good government manager gives you a contract and lets you develop the program the way it fits with the place and the community and integrate it in a way that works and doesn't micromanage that. So that's good work and work that I was used to doing. What I didn't know and had to learn—there were two things. One, is a bit about the arrogance of power. When you are on the other side of power it's surprising how people act, whom you think you knew quite well. And then they become your funder. It's a very strange 'how did that happen?' And their lack of understanding, or insight into that—they think they are just regular good folks.

TIM: So college, you worked in government, then the Vancouver Resources Board and then in government and then once you got to Family Services you had to deal with it from the other side.

IAN: Yeah. And power and how that's played out. And the second is, I realized I had come from—because I worked in government—a position of power with the people I worked with too as a child protection worker and a team leader. And Project Parent, although there were certainly power imbalances there, you spent two days a week—it was a five day a week program but you saw people, families, two days a week—you saw them from 9:30 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. You were in groups with them, you ate lunch with them, you got to know these folks. And you got to know them much differently than you did as a social worker. So my humility... I think I developed much more humility in that setting. But it was a hard lesson to learn because you remembered how you weren't humble and you used power in ways that were oppressive and you realized the colonial nature of child protection work and you look back on some of that with extreme regret.

TIM: So perhaps I could have asked this earlier, but your experience of poverty and its effects on people and political systems and so on did not originate in Windsor; you got that experience here in Vancouver.

IAN: More or less here. I didn't have... I wasn't a trained marxist or anything like that so I didn't have a really strong, dogmatic view of class. It was more experiential. And you're right. In Windsor, poverty—systemic, multi-generational poverty—wasn't what

I knew very well. Because my dad got to be a Postie he had a steady job, lower paying, but a steady job. And I knew... at times we went to my uncle and aunt's with food because the economy of Windsor goes like this and when it goes like that they're broke. And so I knew about poverty but it seemed like an economic issue rather than a systemic issue. Nobody was buying cars and so my uncles couldn't work. They needed a hand. And as soon as the economy picked up they had a job. So poverty was a different...

TIM: So the economics of the situation in Windsor would have been the issue of power and economics was related to employment as opposed to multi-generational...

IAN: Yes.

TIM: And being in that situation for a long time.

IAN: The downtown east side was a different place than it is now. Because many people weren't living in poverty. There were many old pensioners [45:00 #1] and workers compensation board folks from the mines and mills down there. They weren't rich by any stretch of the imagination but...

TIM: Secure incomes.

IAN: Right. And many of the people on income assistance were seasonally on income assistance. They'd come from up-country; the province was booming back in the '70s and '80s. And then there were the chronic addictions and alcohol but it wasn't—it didn't appear to be as big an issue as it is now. And there were lots of SROs around so nobody was homeless. Bernie Smith would never allow that to happen. That was one of the... [Laughs] I need some therapy, clearly. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: Just so we all know, it's ten after.

IAN: Yeah, I can talk.

TIM: I think we should keep going. So, Family Services, ten years?

IAN: Ten years.

TIM: And a good ten years.

IAN: A great ten years. Lot's of different programs. Teri went off on maternity leave and I took over her programs and hired Carolyn Bonesky and Cheryl Mixon and good people like that. And Barbara was great. But I had... I didn't quit Family Services. I actually saved a part of my salary and took another year off because we had a fourth child and my wife wanted to go back to work so I had another year off.

TIM: What year was that? Do you know?

IAN: Leah was three and she's twenty-four now so twenty-one years ago. 1990.

TIM: 1990 you took a year off.

IAN: Yeah, somewhere in there. And I had been given—

TIM: And you were still engaged in all sorts of things in the community.

IAN: Yes.

TIM: I mean you were on boards and politically engaged and...

IAN: Yeah, and I was doing a lot of journalism. I had done city hall broadcasts for years. I did that with Joan Andersen who went on to lead the CBC in western Canada. Back then the technology was so good that you would run a line with little alligator clips and you would take the top pieces off the phone and you would clip the line and dial the number and that was your live feed back to the radio station to broadcast the city council meetings. [Laughs] So I did that. I took every Tuesday afternoon off and I did that for years and years and years—broadcasting the city council meetings. Made commentary and I was a pundit.

TIM: I didn't know this about you.

IAN: I had an interview show with Mayor... Yeah, I started to do council with Art Phillips way back in '74. Yeah, '74 was my first council meeting. And I did an interview show with Harcourt on community television and some CBC stuff. So Harcourt and I all through Campbell's reign... Gordon Campbell and I used to drink beer together after every program. Before he got caught. [Laughter] Always had to have a good stock of beer in his fridge. And Philip Owen. And of course I used to really prepare for these things and ask really intellectual policy questions and then as soon as the phone calls—because the phone lines were always busy...

TIM: Where were you broadcasting? Co-op radio or something?

IAN: Some co-op radio. Sometimes CBC, sometimes Shaw, you know, the community channel. And the phones were just always jammed and they were all, what I used to call, pothole and dog shit questions. I mean, come on. I was just talking about homelessness and constitutional right of cities put into the constitution as the British North America act was... But the first phone call was always, 'well my street's got a pothole.' And Philip Owen loved those questions. Man he would go on for five minutes. You think I can talk? He'd go on about the infrastructure, and how he knew that street as a child and we'd have to—'Philip! Let's move on here!' He's a great guy though. So yeah, I was involved in politics and...

TIM: Okay. And then you ended up working back in government.

IAN: Yes. Because I had the advocacy file at Family Services and then I was seconded part time to start First Call and some people, [50:00 #1] Bob Armstrong, Carol Matusicky,

Tom Gove, Ruth Annis, we all sat around and had a beer after a conference—the Child Welfare League of Canada Conference in Ottawa, again probably 1989-1990—and we said that we need to have a provincial voice for children and youth and we established what was called CYPAN, the Child and Youth Planning and Advocacy Network. A real catchy title. And so I was the part-time coordinator because we had some money through Bob Armstrong and the Children's Hospital and we established First Call. And I did that kind of off the side of my desk at Family Services for a few years. And then Joyce Preston, who I knew from my days with the ministry, and she was the Director of Social Planning here in Vancouver and she became the Child and Youth Advocate for the province and she asked me to be her deputy. So I went from Family Services to an independent office of government. And that was great. That was my best job.

TIM: And it started from nothing.

IAN: Nothing. Didn't even have pencils. Just a piece of paper that said this is the act and...

TIM: And so you were sort of the operational arm of this thing.

IAN: Totally the operational arm. Joyce did the speeches, and wrote the reports and I—I don't want to make it sound like I'm building myself up too much—but I hired everybody and I set the programs up. So she did the external advocacy and I set up the internal pieces and training programs and...

TIM: For perspective, what year was that started in? 1993?

IAN: Probably '93. Yeah.

TIM: Because it came in after the Harcourt provincial government came in.

IAN: Yeah. Joy MacPhail was the minister back then.

TIM: So I don't have a clear vision of what that office actually looked like. How many people worked there?

IAN: It was relatively small. At its height there were maybe eighteen or twenty of us, maximum. And my vision... Joyce and I were on the road a lot. It was hard on my family. But we were in every little borough in British Columbia. I know every hotel in... [Laughter] Nakusp or Fort St. James in the middle of winter at the Motel 6 is not what you call a good time.

TIM: I've been in Fort Nelson but...

IAN: I've been in all of those places. Many times. And that was wonderful but it was...

TIM: Hard.

IAN: Hard on me and the family.

TIM: And so that office did investigations, it heard from kids, it...

IAN: Yeah, well what it did was—what I meant was that I was traveling and many of those trips were with Joyce and so we had a lot of time to talk. I was the driver and we talked and figured it out. And there was a real clarity that we weren't an investigation arm. The Children's Commission was going on with Cindy Morton and Bernd Walter and Paul Pallan at the end. We were the advocacy organization. So Joyce was the external—she was the systemic advocacy person—and I was the individual advocacy person. And so the clarity around people phoning, or us seeing them on these many trips, the clear philosophy was that we wanted to establish advocacy as a good word and positive process within British Columbia for children and youth. And so we needed to get both government onside on that and we needed to get the support system—foster parents, non-profit agencies, and children, youth and their families—on board with that. We saw advocacy as a positive piece of practice, not as a negative piece of...

TIM: And giving voice to children.

IAN: But also helping people who support children and youth to have voice to believe in that and then to believe that government wasn't going to have any retribution against them for having that voice. So the training [55:00 #1] that we set up and did—I worked with Rita Chudnovsky, hired her as a consultant, as an adult educator—we travelled that training all over the province. All the time. Plus for the calls that came into our office on the individual cases, we always went back to the community. We rarely tried to take on situations where we were the advocates, we always wanted the community, or the people who were closest to the kids, to support the kids. Or to have the kids themselves be their advocates.

TIM: Just to illustrate that, so if a call came in from a child in Cranbrook, your response would have been to go to Cranbrook, or have a person go to Cranbrook, work with the community to see what the actual issues were and to give voice to that concern.

IAN: Well there were too many calls for us to go to Cranbrook except for the worst case scenario. What we would do is talk to the young person and find out who they knew best, who they trusted best in Cranbrook and we would phone them and say, 'with our support, would you be this kid's advocate?' We didn't do too much screening on the advocates, because we weren't actually that interested—unless they were clearly exploitative—we really just wanted to support whoever the kid said that they trusted and support the community. It could be a foster parent or whatever. And so we would give advice on how to approach it, advice on policy, those kinds of things, to that advocate. We would talk to the ministry. Sometimes, we didn't even have to do more than that. The advocate would say, 'okay, I can do that.' Other times we would go a little further and talk to the decision makers—it didn't have to be just the ministry, could be the school board or the health board—about the concerns. We were very clear that we didn't have a position. Our position was that the youth or child needed

to be heard and considered, not necessarily agreed with. We didn't even necessarily agree. In fact, I got so good at being neutral that there were just all kinds of really high profile situations where I felt like I was a really good advocate. But at the end of the day, if I were a decision maker, I didn't know how I would rule on this one or that one because they are complex situations.

TIM: But the idea was to force local consideration.

IAN: That's right.

TIM: Hear the voice, give it thought, apply the policy. If the policy is wrong, try to change it.

IAN: And build community. Community that is both government and the service providers and the children or youth. Advocacy is, only at its extreme, an adversarial process. Its not an adversarial process. Its not a law process. Its best practice.

TIM: Best practice. You said this was the best job you ever had. I think that's what you said.

IAN: Yeah.

TIM: Why? What about this job was so compelling or satisfying or...

IAN: Can't you hear it in my...

TIM: I hear it in your voice but how do you crystalize that?

IAN: Well I believed in it. I thought it was exactly what needed to happen. That you needed to build community and that advocacy was one way. There were bigger goals, the bigger goals that come from advocacy, but the basic human rights of being heard and considered.

TIM: And so this job brought together your experiences, your political point of view of rights and...

IAN: They're telling us the time is—

MARSHALL: No, you can keep going.

TIM: I think we'll keep going. This is too interesting.

IAN: We've gotta get you though.

TIM: We can get me a different day.

IAN: Okay.

TIM: So I'm just trying to, in my own mind, understand why this was so satisfying to you. I was just saying that it seems like it brought together your political point of view, your engaged community activity, your work with the Children's Aid, VRB, the government,

and yet you never had training beyond your Political Science. The training was in the trenches.

IAN: Well I would go to UBC courses and things like that. I was always curious so I would take training as often as I could but it was never a formalized training.

TIM: And so how old were you when you hit this job—this job that turned into the best job of your life?

IAN: Oh, well if it was 1993 I would have been 40. Something like that. [60:00 #1]

TIM: And when did you know that this was the best job? The day you got it?

IAN: Oh god no. I was scared shitless then. [Laughter]

TIM: Five years later, or...

IAN: Yeah, yeah. Probably five years later. Or five years into it. I realized this was... You know there were a couple of cases I had to be the lead on that really showed me that this was a great job. And I didn't necessarily win those cases because there wasn't a winning. The winning was looking back at the process and the views and voices and respect for rights and realizing that it worked. We came to—we meaning everyone—came to a best interest decision about this one that kept relationships or built relationships and was in the best interest, or appeared to be in the best interest of, the child or youth. So it's those kinds of things where you know it was a good piece of work, by everybody. And so you're satisfied, especially in child protection and things like that.

I mean Project Parent was a great job too because I got to know people differently. Got to know First Nations people, aboriginal people, and what's going on for them in the trenches but yeah this advocacy one was... And then you know I could talk to, and I didn't do this every day, but I could literally be talking to a minister or a deputy one minute and then a kid the next. Though it was usually the other way around because you'd talk to the kid and it would have gotten so entangled that I could talk to Ross Dawson or Joy MacPhail or someone like that and say, 'I just talked to this kid,' and they'd never heard that before because it's so hierarchical that they don't talk to kids.

TIM: By the time what you said last week got to them it was something different.

IAN: Yeah. But I could pick up the phone, and I obviously had to be careful with how many times I phoned, but I could, and did, pick up the phone and talk to them. And so that ability to go where you needed to go without the hierarchy. I had to respect the hierarchy, by not going over people's heads unnecessarily, but I didn't have to respect the hierarchy in any kind of rigid way.

TIM: So did you feel... I'm talking about this idea of vocation, of finding your real niche in

society in a way that is more than a job, in a way that is an expression of your life's interests. Is that what you felt there?

IAN: I did. I mean I felt, and still feel, whole. Because it's not just about that, it's about my family, it's about my community, it's about politics. I mean I had an activist sense from the '60's that you had to put a whole bunch of things together. It wasn't just one piece or another. You had to have a balance—a balance that worked not only for you but for what you were doing. So yeah. That seemed to be where it came together the best.

TIM: So that eventually came to and end because...

IAN: Well one of the questions here was what is my biggest disappointment. And my biggest disappointment was that I didn't try to convince Joyce enough to take a second term. She had always said she would only do one term. She thought advocates should only have one term and we expected—I expected—wrongly, that the Advocates Act would continue and that the next person, which could have been me, would have the same, or somewhat similar, kind of ideas because we had done so well. They offered her the position, she said, 'no I only wanted to do one term.' And then they went and changed the whole Act, put it under the Attorney General.

TIM: So this happened in...

IAN: It would be 1997 I'm guessing. '98 maybe or even 2000.

TIM: Who was the minister?

IAN: Um, Linda Reid was a part of it. So...

TIM: Well that would have been after 2001. [65:00 #1]

IAN: Yeah it was. It was after 2001. It was the new liberal government. So it was probably Gordon Hogg. Gordon Hogg and Linda Reid was kind of the main point person on this although it was an all-party piece. And it was actually Jeff Plante who introduced the new Act because the Advocate, which was called something else, was under the Attorney General and Jane Morley got appointed.

TIM: Okay. That's right. And you just left when Joyce left?

IAN: No, no. I always wanted to stay with windmills, maybe sometimes too long. Jane asked me to be her deputy and I said I would do that. And so I stayed for about a year and half and it was obvious then that there was—the windmill was going around but there was no stopping... That analogy just wore out, but essentially it was not going to be what I wanted it to be. I was prepared to compromise. I'm pretty compromising. Well, maybe not compromising, but I'm pretty flexible. But Jane was a mediator and a lawyer and she just had it in her head that advocacy was, somehow or another,

adversarial and that she wanted a more mediative way of doing it. And I kept saying, 'this is the model Jane - what's adversarial about it and what's not mediative about it?' Because that's where... And I really liked Jane a lot and so I don't want to talk too bad, especially on camera. But even if I weren't on camera, she was a wonderful woman and had some real decent ideas but just was not crisp, couldn't make a decision on things. And so at the end of the day I just said...

TIM: It became frustrating for you?

IAN: Yeah. This was not for me anymore. And we had combined with the Children's Commissioner. Both of them had come in and so there was an investigative part to it and it was... They were much more legal over there and I am very flexible around the edges. Ambiguity is very comfortable for me because that is where you are creative but they were a bureaucracy and there was no creativity in that bureaucracy. It was all just policy, policy.

TIM: So did you leave that job for another job or did you just leave that job?

IAN: Yep. I did. I went to the Vancity Community Foundation. The Executive Director.

TIM: So you went from one job directly to another or did you...

IAN: Directly across the street, interestingly enough. So I went there.

TIM: That's when David Driscoll left.

IAN: Yep.

TIM: And what attracted you to that job?

IAN: The difference. I wanted to try something somewhat totally different but still having a bit of a connection. And I thought Vancity is a very progressive company. It is a credit union. It had money and was prepared to invest it in total community projects. And so I felt that there was enough there for me to say, 'let's try this, let's try this piece of work.'

TIM: Very different from other work you'd done.

IAN: Yes. You're essentially in the private sector but with a hearty and robust social conscience and a fairly well developed sense of membership and therefore the co-operative piece was... But it became clear that that was more at the governance level, the bureaucratic level, of the credit union. Most of the people were bankers. And they had come from TD or Bank of Montreal and they would go to TD and Bank of Montreal. I was always amazed by their enthusiasm for Vancity until they left Vancity. [Laughter] I mean how the hell can you be so enthusiastic about Vancity and then go to TD for a job that pays $30'000 more? [Laughter] What happened to the co-operative principles that you just espoused? And it's... I don't know if it's hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, it almost

sounds like too strong of a word. [70:00 #1] Like racism or something. Are they hypocritical because they...

TIM: Do one thing one day and then...

IAN: Well maybe. [Laughter] But yeah, I was always puzzled by that.

MARSHALL: And were you still just as involved as earlier when we talked about that? On boards and doing the journalism and stuff at this point?

IAN: Yes. Although I backed away from the journalism because it was a very steep learning curve and so I really needed to. But yeah, I was still doing a few things but I was not as engaged as...

TIM: And the time when you were with the Advocate's office? You were still doing...

IAN: Uh, no. I was doing the interview shows with the Mayor during those times because they were the less pundit-like things but I moved away from... I was four hours away—while at the Advocate's office—from running for Mayor of Vancouver. COPE didn't have a candidate and they needed a candidate and—somewhat out of desperation but not nearly as negative as it sounds but somewhat out of desperation—they came and asked me if I would run. And it was Philip's second term. Philip Owen. He'd already beat Harry Rankin and now he was running again and whoever was going to run against him was going to get murdered and I said, 'okay, I'll do it, because I don't want to be the Mayor.' [Laughter] And I clearly won't become the Mayor but I'll run. [Laughter] And I talked to Joyce about that and she said, 'Sure, if you gotta do it you gotta do it.' But then they came up with Carmella Alivado who was very good actually.

TIM: Very good.

IAN: But got murdered, got slaughtered in the...

TIM: So at this stage, you had been through a good ten years with your first job, a good ten years with Family Services, and...

IAN: Probably closer to eight.

TIM: Okay eight years. And so now you're in your late 40's.

IAN: Yeah. 50's probably.

TIM: And at the Vancity Community Foundation you didn't go five years. How long were you there?

IAN: No. Three years.

TIM: Three years.

IAN: And it was the first time I ever got a severance package. But it was done because they wanted to reorganize. They wanted to be rid of me. It was a very, very difficult time. It was… David Driscoll had been out of that office essentially for three years and there was an acting person, and I didn't know any of this, but the team was very in favour of the acting person. And I got the job and she didn't. And so they were very, very opposed and appealed up to the board level against me.

TIM: So the environment…

IAN: The environment was very toxic when I went in there. And I had never experienced that level of toxicity and I used my social work kind of skills, or lack thereof, to try to resolve it over a year and a half. I remember Bruce Ralston was on the board of the foundation and on the board of Vancity. And he said, 'Ian, you're crazy; fire them, fire them all.' [Laughs] But I said to Bruce, 'I can't do that.' But it was either you or them.

TIM: We don't have to quote on that.

IAN: And Bruce was right. That's what should have happened. And so about a year and a half or so into it, I still didn't have the humanity to… I did have the guts to fire a couple of them and there were a couple that I got transferred around the credit union but by this time the toxicity had spread. Throughout the credit union. And I was branded as somebody who just couldn't do the job and…

TIM: Persona non grata.

IAN: Yeah. And I had some allies in the credit union but not many.

TIM: Let's just pick that apart a tiny bit, and I don't want to go into this in great detail, particularly in this situation, but if I look back on your professional life, until that time you always maintained a strong hand on cases if you will. Court workers, children, parenting with Project Parent, [75:00 #1] and even at the advocate level it was about cases.

IAN: Yep.

TIM: The tie was to individuals and cases, communities and cases, and here you're at a place where it isn't about cases. Do you have any thoughts or analysis about your preparation, or ability around doing that job? I don't mean this at all critically, I'm just trying to figure out, I guess from my own life, how your previous experience played into that, because I know you as a very flexible individual.

IAN: Yeah. Well I think this was… I suppose this was, interestingly enough, the first job where I was the leader of the whole pack. All of the other ones, even First Call though a little bit less… Certainly I was second with Barbara, I was second with Joyce, I was second with Jane. So I had a vision but it wasn't a total vision and I could put that vision in a case format. This one, I had as a sense that as a leader, I wasn't supposed

to be doing the case stuff. I was supposed to be doing the leadership piece. And after a year and a half I thought to myself that I am going to do this the way I know how to do things. Which is not necessarily from a case point of view, but I was going to get much more involved in developing programs with money attached to them within the foundation. That had been the power piece with the people I was having so much trouble with. It was also a very bureaucratic organization. That was the thing too. Vancity is incredibly bureaucratic as I suppose a bank needs to be. But it reminded me, surprisingly, of government and their policies and it was...

TIM: And you had sought out non-bureaucratic positions elsewhere along the way.

IAN: Yeah. And so to try to relate to those... So I had my best success, and the most satisfying times in the last year and a half or so at Vancity when I was able to talk Linda Reid out of five million dollars to do a sinking fund for child care, which I'm incredibly proud of because of the work that the child care community has been able to do. And how, if that would have gone to the Vancouver Foundation for example, it would have been administered in a very bureaucratic kind of way but I really just turned it over with minimal but sufficient amount of paper to not get caught up in Canada Revenue stuff or stuff with Linda Reid. And so I just kind of made it...

TIM: I know it's still doing good work today.

IAN: It's still doing fantastic work. Doing the Surrey Homelessness Foundation. They weren't a foundation, it's the Surrey Homelessness Fund partially funded by the City of Surrey and donors there, but they wanted a foundation to administer and they put out RFPs and the Vancouver Foundation applied and we applied and I sold them on that—which was about a twenty million dollar endowment—with both the service they would get and the credit union backing. And so I was very proud of that. I must say a part of that was kind of macho, I was very proud to beat the Vancouver Foundation because we were a small foundation. But it was my strength. I could build programs. I could build something that still shows.

And now the Vancity Community Foundation is taking over the Service Canada Homelessness Partnership Strategy. They are kind of the back office for all the community-based things and they would have never got that if they hadn't got the Surrey Homelessness Fund. So my vision of where that was going I think I could have done more. Child care too. The vision of where I thought the foundation should go and how it should relate [80:00 #1] to the goals of the credit union has played itself out. And so I took the foundation out of deficit and doubled its endowment in three years, to about thirty-six million from about twelve. I tripled it in three years.

TIM: So you did well.

IAN: I felt like I did well. Clearly the foundation board... I mean I was also hired by Tim Louis and those folks and there had been a shift on the board politically from Bob Williams and Tim Louis to more Bruce Ralston and Patrice Pratt.

TIM: A little more of a moderate.

IAN: More moderate. But that strengthened the other social enterprise side of Vancity. My enemies... I wasn't used to having enemies like that. I was used to having people who didn't agree with me and maybe we didn't get along that well but we were never enemies.

TIM: Opponents maybe but...

IAN: Opponents, yeah. But these were enemies and they hated me. What the hell did I do to be hated? And I'm not sure they hated me but it sure felt like that at times. And so that was really an interesting...

TIM: I'd like to call a break for a few minutes.

IAN: Yeah. Okay.

MARSHALL: Definitely. Sure.

[Begin Tape #2]

IAN: [0:00 #2] So I stuck out my thumb and I got a ride outside of Toronto, and then, uh, somebody stopped, and said, "Where you going?" I said, "Well, I'm going to Ottawa, and then I'm going to Vancouver." He said, "Too bad. I'm going to Truro, Nova Scotia." And it took me about a microsecond to say, "Okay, I'll go there."

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: I didn't know anybody in Vancouver, so it was just a—it was just a thing I said I was going to, right? And then I ended up in St. John's, Newfoundland, and back then you didn't have email, so you just sent—and long-distance was just, you didn't do that on the telephone unless somebody died, and I hadn't died so I just sent everybody a postcard that said, "Took the wrong turn and ended up in St. John's, Newfoundland, had a great time." And so I kind of made that a metaphor for my life, you just stick out your thumb, you think you know where you're going but take a—when somebody stops, have a good look in, make sure they're not driving drunk.

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: And then take the ride! And where you end up will probably be just fine. And so, uh, and so when you say I fell into media, well I fell into media. I was kind of interested in City Hall. I knew about Co-op Radio, it had just started...

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: And I went down and did that. And then I saw they were doing, you know, radio documentary work and I thought, "That looks interesting." You get into a little more in-depth stuff and so you do that, and...

TIM: This would be like...

IAN: And if it wasn't any good, it would be like, "Okay, I'll get out here and I'll stick my thumb out and I'll go somewhere else," right? It's really a good way to live.

TIM: But the analogy...

IAN: [laughs]

TIM: The analogous thing today is social media. Blogging, doing all kinds of things on social media... you were doing that through the radio interviews and, you know, the media stuff you were doing, in a different way. And, um, you had no—like, would anyone have predicted that you'd have gotten interested in this stuff?

IAN: Not particularly.

TIM: This is kind of surprising.

IAN: Yeah. Yeah.

TIM: To you as much as anyone else?

IAN: Yeah! Yeah.

TIM: Okay. Well...

IAN: I mean, that's why I went to Vancity, in some ways, right? I was used to sticking my thumb out and I thought, "This'll be an interesting..." So, it turned out...

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: So it turned out to be not the greatest, right, in the world, but not bad. I learned a lot of things. And I only hold a few resentments. [laughs]

TIM: So we're back after the break, and we were talking about other stuff, but...did you have anything more you wanted to say about Vancity? About that experience? Or...

IAN: It... No. I only want to clarify that Patrice Pratt and Bruce Ralston are good, political friends of mine, and so I didn't want to infer that somehow or another they were behind it. It was just the power structure. I was identified with the... with the Bob Williamses and Tim Lewises, which in fact I wasn't really that close to, but politically, we were friends, just as Patrice and Bruce were—are. And... But again, that was kind of the rigidity of Vancity in some ways, and the social part of Vancity—not social from a social point of view but from the social entrepreneur side of Vancity was very dogmatic and rigid and bureaucratic, and so you're either on one side—if you weren't on that side you were on another side, and you got branded into that. So that, I just wanted...

TIM: There's still some of that going on, as you're obviously aware...

IAN: Tons of it going on! You know, I haven't given any names and I won't but, uh, yeah, it hasn't changed. It has not changed. Which is really not a good thing. Not a good thing for Vancity.

TIM: So—you took a severance there, and then were you unemployed for a bit? You were quite quickly onto something else.

IAN: Yeah. Yeah. It was, that had never happened, so I was able to—my wife and I were able to finally pay off the twenty-five year mortgage in thirty-five years by using the severance, because it would have turned into a forty or forty-five year mortgage.

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: You know, the kids are going to university and although they worked in the summer and stuff like that, you help them out and things like that. And because we had... throughout our time, although I had done two years of parenting stuff, my wife... [5:00 #2] not only did one of my kids die, a couple of them had very, very serious health issues. We were... somebody was always home with them, throughout that time, which sucks the money up pretty good. So it was nice that we got the severance. But, yeah, you're right, I was really thrown. I was fifty-eight, and I didn't... I saw this foundation at Vancity as a career-ending job, and so suddenly that plan was thrown up in the air. You know, if I was using my metaphor of hitch-hiking, somebody had led me out into the middle of the bush without a sleeping bag or a tent or...

TIM: I've been there. [laughs]

IAN: [laughs] Yeah! It was kinda like, what do I do? Do I retire? At fifty-eight? You don't have a lot of money, you don't have a great pension, you know? There was a few years left in me, I was thinking four or five years before I could look at retiring. My wife was a bit younger—is a bit younger. So it was a difficult. I wanted to relax, but I wasn't able to relax like I hope I'm going to be able now that I'm retiring a bit more—because there's both financial stability and it feels like a career end now. I'm jumping ahead, but... So, that was a difficult time. And Ruth had talked to me and I'd never ever thought... I kept telling her, "No, I got other things on my mind." Especially when I went to Vancity, I didn't actually want to get back into social work. I felt like I had a different direction and had connections there but it wasn't being a social worker. But I thought, well, you know, it's one of the best agencies in the province. If they'll have me for a shorter period as a bridge Executive Director, three to five years, I'll throw my hat in there. And so I did.

MARSHALL: And this was?

IAN: Oh, Pacific Community Resources Society. And this was...

TIM: And you mentioned Ruth…

IAN: Ruth Annis.

TIM: We'll insert some of that.

IAN: Yeah, Ruth, pretty famous. And so I bring my hat in, and… I was… I mean, okay, humbly speaking, I think I was a great candidate. But I was also fortunate they were at the end of a long six month search that had gotten them nothing. [laughs]

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: You know, sometimes I say to my kids, you might not look qualified, but you never know who else is applying, so if you think it's a good job for you, apply for it! Because sometimes you won't even get shortlisted, and other times you'll get the job. It's the same… that's happened to me a couple times too. But I was on the fortunate end of this one. They scooped me up right away and I started. Yeah—I was only unemployed for a couple of months, and then took over for Ruth. Which was… she's an icon and a deservedly revered matriarch of social services in British Columbia, and a fine…

TIM: A giant for the industry.

IAN: Absolutely.

TIM: So, how was it to take over for a giant? Pretty intimidating, I would think.

IAN: You know, it was more intimidating internally than externally, because I felt like, it was a competition. I never felt competitive with Ruth. I felt like my work externally through boards and things was different, but comparatively the same with Ruth's so I was not… I didn't feel like I had to take over that external piece and compete with her. I could do it…

TIM: Your own way…

IAN: …do the external piece and do it my own way and keep up the values of Ruth and PCRS but just do it differently. I was more concerned about being the leader of the organization. And was certainly feeling pretty wounded by Vancity and being unsuccessful as a leader, at the end of the day. You know, they let me go. So they perceived me as unsuccessful in that role, and I had to wear some of that, and I wasn't sure how much of it I needed to wear because you're too close to it at the time.

TIM: Emotions get engaged and…

IAN: Yeah, yeah, emotions get engaged.

TIM: Relationships come and go and…

IAN: Yeah. And so, how much of that was my fault and how much was circumstantial?

[10:00 #2] What did I need to learn from that and how could I bring that forward? Would I be successful in this one? Um. It was good that the board was relatively engaged and they didn't give me any huge instructions about moving forward.

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: And so, I didn't have to be a hatchet. The Vancity board didn't give me any instructions but they probably should have, in a sense, because I was coming in so cold and naïve about the situation—that would have been helpful. This board, I wasn't so naïve and I was very clear with them, like, "Do you have some instructions?" So I could take that and, you know, they had senior management at PCRS—Ingrid Kastens, Laurie Birdsall had been around for decades, and I knew them, and they knew me, and we were all quite tentative but I was able to move forward with that stuff. So the first year I was quite quiet. I didn't join the [UCS] Co-op board, the Federation [of Community Social Services of BC] board, I tried to build credibility with the organization internally.

TIM: From an external point of view... they had invested all their money into programs, people, doing things, and so there were some organizational structure, I guess, organizational weaknesses. Did you have to take on some different kind of leadership to figure that one out? Because that—that was a deliberate strategy.

IAN: Yup. By Ruth.

TIM: By Ruth and the board. And you would have brought a different sense to that, probably. Right?

IAN: Yeah, I think there was two things probably—two major things that I, when I looked at it, I didn't have a particular mandate to change. Well, I did. I took it on as a mandate, but it wasn't an externally imposed mandate. One was the relation... the reputation and the relationship in the community of PCRS. There'd been some, as you know, some very bruising things had gone on around contracts and all kinds of things within the community. And Ruth's reputation, or PCRS's reputation as a partner, was... was low. But many other organizations were low too. It wasn't just them who made the enemies, the enemies were mutually made...

TIM: It was a bruising time.

IAN: Yeah—and caused by the circumstances around it. In hindsight, you always think you could do better. So I... so one of my mandates was try to build trust in the sector. Not just within PCRS, but across different sectors. And it helped that I knew the players, and we could sit and have lunch or coffee and talk about: 'How do we change this? How do we mutually change this?' So that was one of the pieces externally that I wanted to take on. Internally, yes—I came in with a... It shows a bit of—in hindsight—a bit of personal desperateness to get a job and prove something to myself, maybe

too early, that in fact I didn't even look at the financial statements when I took it on. I assumed... I assumed that an agency with a size and reputation of PCRS was healthier than it was. It was in bad shape, financially. And yeah, we need to be careful about editing this out, be careful with this, because... but they had invested their money in exactly how you said, in the values of the organization, but had gotten a bit too far out on one of the fundamental values of governance, which is to stay financially healthy. [15:00 #2]

So I spent four years at that. And we are out of deficit and have about a half million dollars in assets now—in liquid assets. So we're in much better shape than we were four years ago. It's still not... for an agency of that size, it's still not anywhere close to what it probably should be. But it is what it is. But I've also—oh, I'm speaking too much of myself. But the other piece of that was to try to expand the funding base. It was focused so much on MCFD that uh, it got to there that in government, you were gonna have a tsunami of Pacific Community Resources levels.

TIM: And that was part of the bruising time, that had happened previously.

IAN: Yeah, that's right. And so, how do we expand the funding base of PCRS so that—so that we can alleviate the risk. I never liked... I've never been much of... Even though Vancity Community Foundation was very much about fundraising, I've never been much of a believer, politically, in fundraising. I'm still back in the old school...

TIM: The charity model.

IAN: The charity model. Right? So I mean, United Gospel Mission is something that just takes that to the extreme and it makes me sick. But even non-profits doing that. Probably in limited ways it's okay. But the real strength of PCRS is it's social entrepreneurship. It still is. It's a sense of... There's not a grant that goes by my desk or my managers' and directors' desks without us talking about it. How can we use this? What can we do with this? What're our ideas around this? Do you think you could write it? So our fundraising strategy—which I think I've even ramped up even further than Ruth did—our fundraising strategy was grant writing. That we can write grants—that's a more effective, in many ways, more effective research and development strategy than fundraising.

TIM: Than the traditional, like direct-mail and...

IAN: Yeah, direct-mail and sad stories, all of that kind of stuff. That is... In my experience at Family Services [of Greater Vancouver], I keep going like this [gestures] because at Family Services they hired a fundraiser who I think, I suspect, still to this day has trouble making their salary. It's a difficult thing to do. Now, capital campaigns is different from fundraising. Family Services has always been good at capital campaigns, and the real money is in endowments, wills, and estates. Wills and estates and endowments—that's where the real money in fundraising is. But you have to... you have to get your base fundraising database and things, and then you build up your

pyramid. That's a long job. It's a long, slow job. It takes you away from what you want. What I want to do as an Executive Director is provide services for people. Innovative services for people that work—that aren't necessarily all government-controlled. So if you can get a million bucks, which we are fairly close to in grant money every year, that will... The fourteen million dollars we get from government is, interestingly enough, kinda background money. That pays the bills to keep the lights on. The real work you do is with the million dollars.

TIM: That's marginal—it's marginal in the sense that it puts you at the front of various things...

IAN: That's right, yeah.

TIM: ...and try to...

IAN: Deconstruction, Green Courier, Employment Services Co-operative [PCRS social enterprises], you know all of those, the youth service hubs, the Chilliwack Contact Centre—that's where you invest your money. And government will follow that money when you prove it. You run that for a year or two with your money, and governments will follow because it's the innovative thing to do.

TIM: The R and D function.

IAN: Yeah. It's the next thing. So you always need to be out in front of that. And if you're spending your money and time fundraising, ten bucks here, twenty-five bucks there, you don't have that money. You don't have the money and you don't have the time.

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: So that was my strategy, the three things I wanted to do at PCRS. [20:00 #2] I just made up those three things, there were other things I wanted to do too, other improvement stuff. But that was, that was the gross strategy. That has worked quite well.

TIM: So you're leaving in the next...three weeks? Thirteen working days?

IAN: [snickers] Thirteen working days.

TIM: [laughs] Oh dear. It's probably too early to say, when you look back, what's been your best work, or your most satisfying work at PCRS? Is it too early to talk about that?

IAN: Um. Yeah. The most satisfying... Yeah, sure, it probably is in some ways. Probably the most satisfying is some of the social entrepreneurship and hub-model work that we've tried. And again, taking Ruth's... The uncomfortable part of this interview is I make it sound like me too much—because you're always following good ideas and people. I mean, the Chilliwack Health Contacts Centre—which is gonna just be an incredible facility out in Chilliwack that we're just building with BC Housing—wouldn't

have started without Tom Heatherington and a woman named Leanne Hanson taking it over, and Laurie Birdsall being supportive of it. I mean, I'm out front there, I got them some money, but it's been on the work of those folks, right.

TIM: So, we'll just stop there for a minute, for a second. What's the learning about that? What, what are you learning right this moment, I guess, about this idea of: 'I'm interviewing you, and you're talking about your career, and now you want to thank and observe the work of others as part of it?' I think that's a pretty critical piece of our lives—acknowledging the work of others, and acknowledging our role in that whether it's leadership or support or whatever. It's a tough thing, don't you think? For leaders to attribute success elsewhere but feel in themselves the role they played? Maybe I'm just speaking for myself here [laughs].

IAN: Well—I don't find it that difficult because when I look at it, I realize that—it's not even a realization, it's just kind of a fact—that my role with them was to say, "What a good idea. I want to support that. I think you should do that, and what is it I can do?" And not only, "What is it I can do?" But "I can do this." Adding my ideas to it so the whole thing of "two is better than one and three is better than two." And,when you get to four maybe it's not better than three—gets a bit too crowded [laughs].

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: But you know what I mean?

TIM: But don't you—

IAN: But I could—

TIM: Don't you think you and Laurie and those other people you mentioned would all claim some credit around this?

IAN: Yeah, yeah.

TIM: So it's okay for you to claim some credit.

IAN: Yeah. It is. Yeah. Am I? I think I am.

TIM: Yes, you are. I was just interested in that role of a leader attributing their own success to the success of others, and sharing that, and sharing the accolades as well as the responsibilities for it. It just was an interesting thought for me.

IAN: But it's about building community.

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: And if you don't share the appropriate sharing…

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: If you just take, and not acknowledge—it's not even about giving...

TIM: Right.

IAN: It's about...

TIM: Acknowledging.

IAN: Yeah, acknowledging. Then—then, you know, it comes back to a basic philosophy of mine in social work and my balance of life, which is: don't take too much credit for things that go well, and don't take too much blame for what goes wrong.

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: You gotta balance it out. Because—

TIM: One goes with the other.

IAN: One goes with the other, all the time. All the time. Figure out what your responsibilities are. Listen to guilt, don't be driven by it.

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: Listen to it, though! Because there's something, something's telling you something there. And uh...

TIM: Okay, so. You know, I've talked to you about it before, about what you might want to do, and you're really... You're really getting off the uh... You've been really clear that you're done with the work part of this—the paid side of this thing. And you're retiring and that's really clear and good. So. I have just a couple questions about that. [laughs] [25:00 #2] First of all, you said you did some boxing when you were young?

IAN: Yeah. See my nose?

TIM: Yeah.

IAN: It doesn't have anything left in it.

TIM: You know, I have that memory of you coming to a meeting a year or so ago, with a blackened face.

IAN: Oh!

TIM: Having been hit in the head with a baseball bat, or a baseball, I guess.

IAN: I have to go get it broken again.

TIM: You do?

IAN: Oh yeah. I can't breathe out of this thing at all. It's just...

TIM: Ahhhhhh. Okay, so let's go back to boxing, because I... Do you... what kind of a boxer are you? Are you a counter-puncher or are you a—

IAN: George Chuvalo. Lead with your nose.

TIM: [laughs] That's not a good strategy!

IAN: Well.

TIM: George went a long way, he was pretty big. [laughs]

IAN: I know. But I was short. I didn't have a reach. And I'm fairly heavy so I have to box in a weight class that—usually guys are taller and have longer reach, so you gotta get inside. But if you get inside, you gotta take a few punches.

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: I feel like I'm way too macho, that was somewhat the cup of coffee going–

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: But really! You gotta get inside and you're gonna take a few punches as you get inside.

TIM: So how are you, what kind of a boxing style are you in your professional life? Get inside?

IAN: Yeah, but friendly. I wouldn't be aggressive. I mean, that was my neighbourhood, where I grew up. So I've gotten out of being aggressive. There's this... I took a mediation course at the Justice Institute and I didn't find it very satisfactory. I thought, "This just doesn't work for me." So then one of my team members, or one of my teams, wanted to take a basic conflict resolution course. And so we contracted with the J.I. to do Conflict Resolution 101. And I sat in like a good supervisor—or I think I was a manager or something—but thinking I knew all of this stuff, and I realized why I didn't like mediation, because I didn't have the basics of conflict resolution. I'd gotten pretty good at resolving conflicts to a point, and then I just... If I couldn't resolve them I became a boxer again. [laughs]

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: I didn't hit anybody! But I mean, okay, you wanna fight, let's fight!

TIM: [laughs]

IAN: And I realized that conflict resolution was the whole meal deal, it wasn't just eighty percent. You had to do one hundred percent. And that was quite formative to me. I almost forgot your question.

TIM: Well I mean—

IAN: So, I don't have a boxing style anymore, in a sense. Although I still have the instincts, my, uh, I don't box anymore, in my life. I get along with people. I go a long, long way to get along with people, I suppose, and I'm sure there are a couple of examples. But I think that was probably the only time that instinct, that new method, did me wrong—was at Vancity. I maybe should have recognized that I was in the ring, and there was no way out of that ring.

TIM: You were gonna have to do something.

IAN: I was gonna have to, and I did it too late. So that was a bit of a learning. But I took it to PCRS, and I never had to use it. It was a bit of a... No matter what style you have, at the end of the day you need another style.

TIM: Right.

IAN: Very occasionally. And it should move away, you shouldn't give up all your styles.

TIM: I boxed only briefly, when I was young. But I know that to be a fact, one style will get you a long ways but in the end you gotta have some alternatives as well.

IAN: Yep.

TIM: Um. Let's go back and just summarize this off. If you had to declare victory at some point in your career, where would you put the flag? The thing you did really well.

IAN: The advocacy piece. Yeah. That was, that was the... That was the best. Yep.

TIM: And that came from a combination of the environment and your own work? Or like, what's the satisfying piece about that? I know we covered this before but let's just do it again. What's...Why did that become the satisfaction for you?

IAN: Well because no matter what happened in that environment, I had a clarity of vision that has never been as clear at that time. I knew what needed to happen. And it wasn't arrogance, it was just... And there was support. And if I had to articulate that vision, it didn't matter who was in the room, they would agree. "You're right. That's what we want to get to here." So.

TIM: You're really at the center of that leadership function right then. [30:00 #2]

IAN: Yep. Yep.

TIM: Okay, so if you had to declare a... a retreat, or an armistice, or... I know there's the Vancity thing and maybe that's not a place we should talk about this right now, but is there a... uh... I don't look back on my life and see the failures, I see the victories, so I don't know where I'd put my own, but do you have a place?

IAN: Yeah. I was thinking about this because I read this thing a couple of days ago, and just last month, you were there, at the BC Native Friendship Centre...

MARSHALL: BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship—

IAN: BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres—there was a declaration—or whatever it is—of solidarity between the Federation [of Community Social Services of BC] and the Friendship Centres. And they asked me to be a witness, which I didn't know you had to speak at. I'd never been a witness at one of those before. And uh... Both the failure and the triumph of my career—maybe not the triumph but certainly the failure—of the things I look back on became really clear in that thing, right? I think I used the metaphor of, there used to be a lake between us—between the Aboriginal community and the mainstream social services communities. And you know, we may have played on the edges, but we didn't play with each other. We didn't interact and things like that. And somehow or another this... this solidarity between... and a commitment to try and to try to make amends on both sides for colonization and racism and oppression was what this agreement was about. And this lake became our lake to play in, to cleanse ourselves. And all I could think of... I thought of, you know, four to six names of people that I'd worked with over the years who, boy, if I could go back, I helped to ruin their lives. I won't take full responsibility, but I was part of a system that I didn't have a full understanding of. And I did things that weren't criminal or even bad practice, as practice was known at the time, but you know...

TIM: Just part of the systemic—

IAN: Yeah, you know, you get into this stuff and you're young and you don't know the dynamics of it until you're older and the oppression is articulated better and understood better. Yeah—like I said, I don't take on huge amounts of blame. But I felt cleansed. I felt the beginning of a cleansing in this experience that was very, very powerful, but also reminded me of my role as a social worker in British Columbia over thirty-nine years. If you worked in the system, you were an oppressor, you were a colonizer. And again, guilt... Guilt. You listen to guilt, you're not ruled by guilt. So.

TIM: Well, we've all experienced that to one degree or another.

IAN: Yeah.

TIM: I have.

IAN: I'm glad you acknowledge it.

TIM: Yeah.

IAN: Because you can't get away from it.

TIM: No.

IAN: You don't have to be driven by it, but you still have to figure out what your values are.

TIM: Mmhmm. One final thing I'd just like to touch on is... Your wife is a person that you've brought up a number of times. You wanna say anything more about her role? I know she's been sick recently and...

IAN: Yeah, she's got breast cancer. Um. You know, we've been together now for thirty-six years. We had two kids before we decided to get married. She was married quite young.

TIM: We won't tell anyone about this.

IAN: Oh, no, no, no. It's a story. So we uh... I had a longstanding invitation to get married with her, but she was... she was...

TIM: She was aloof about that?

IAN: She had decided that we had two kids, maybe there was a future here. So she surprised me and said yes one day. And it was a surprise wedding, because most of our family thought—and most of our friends thought—we were married. So we planned a surprise wedding and it was a lot of fun. She's been great. She's just a wonderful person, a great mother, a great wife, a great friend, a great lover.

TIM: Been supporting you in your professional life?

IAN: Absolutely. Yeah. Especially with the advocate's office, I was gone a lot.

TIM: Mmhmm.

IAN: I was gone a lot. And she was a great support there. She was...

TIM: For those of us who know you, we know this about her. That she's been a great support. So I just wanted to give you that opportunity. Anything else you want to say?

IAN: No. I mean, I'm only retiring from social work for a year, and then we'll see what happens.

TIM: [laughs]

MARSHALL: [laughs]

IAN: I've got a lot of other things... I just don't want to be one for a year! [laughs]

TIM: Well, there's so many things that you've done that you could keep doing.

IAN: And I will.

TIM: Some political stuff. Lots of things, you're young.

IAN: I've still got some bones to break.

TIM: With a baseball. [laughs]

TIM: Don't go back to boxing.

IAN: Oh no, I won't go back to boxing.

TIM: All right, so it's been about an hour and twenty minutes, something like that? We're still here at the United Community Services Co-op, and this is Ian.

MARSHALL: Thank you.

TIM: Thank you, Ian, so much for the interview.

IAN: You set the bar very high here, Tim.

[End of recording]