

BULLETIN

At a crossroads: union direction and a personal journey of activism

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In contemplating what to write for my report as Director for Region 1, my thoughts cross many boundaries. There are many things I want to communicate to and about my members, the people who work in our 41 HSA sites on Vancouver Island from Duncan north, the Sechelt Peninsula including Powell River, and the Squamish to Pemberton area.

Some of things at this crossroad are personal, and others are about where we as a union have been during the past year and of course, where we might be heading.

From an organizational standpoint one of the big crossroads for us in the past year has definitely been bargaining, as nearly every single one of us in the region has been affected. We have been part of each of the tables bargaining under the HEABC and the CSSEA collective agreements. In Region 1 we have been very well represented on the respective bargaining teams. At the paramedical professional table we had two bargaining team members and at the CSSEA community and social services table we have several bargaining team members from many different certifications. The integrity and commitment of your representation has been commendable.

From a personal perspective, standing at a crossroad in life has always been filled with emotion, for the very meaning of arriving signifies tremendous change and challenge. I remember very clearly one of the most symbolic crossroads in my life, January 1989. It was at that time in my life when Kelly Finlayson the union activist was born. The life that I had grown accustomed to for 19 years was over for my husband's employment had suddenly been terminated. My income was now the primary source for a family of five and although I was somewhat familiar with my rights under my collective agreement, it was something I had always taken for granted. I asked a question at a union meeting and haven't looked back since.

As I learned what HSA as an organization stood for, the personal progression and transformation occurred. In my 10 years as an activist I have never encountered a more dedicated group of people. I believe we are all cut from the same cloth, from the elected members including stewards, to all staff members who tirelessly serve you, the general membership. I am extremely proud to be part of this group.

The crossroad in my personal journey of union activism is that I needed to decide whether I could commit another two years of my life to the position of Regional Director. The members of Region 1 helped me make

that decision.

Between December and March, I traversed parts of the region several times, walked three picket lines (Nanaimo, John Howard Society, and Comox Valley Transition Society) and attended two rallies. I attended 14 chapter meetings and answered many questions about job action policies, bargaining and our union constitution.

What impressed me over and over again as I spoke to members was the depth of questions and the resolute manner in which information was digested.

My job as Regional Director is to formulate an opinion after listening carefully to members questions and represent your interests at the Board of Directors table as that is where decisions are made between conventions. All concerns have equal merit whether they come from a member who works in the acute care sector of health or the community and social service sector of health.

For the groups of members who have completed job action and bargaining and who now enjoy the benefits of a ratified collective agreement and for those of you still struggling I challenge each and every one of you to remember your job action. Try to envision the countless hours that went into the process to help you in your working environment. Perhaps you too will arrive at a crossroad with a decision to make.

Kelly Finlayson represents Region 1 on HSAs Board of Directors.

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