

Where are They Now?

Name: Rosalind Elizabeth Pratt (everyone calls me Ros)

Previous name (if applicable): Rosalind Elizabeth Thistle

Class of: 1971 and 1987

I started a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Social Welfare in Sept 1967, at the “ripe old age” of 16. I graduated April 1971, just 20 years old, ready to start a permanent job as a Welfare Officer with the Provincial Government. My Bachelor of Social Work was completed as a second degree (part-time) in 1987, while working full-time and raising a young family. I was fortunate to have a supportive husband who helped with family responsibilities and a 5th year placement at the Women’s Centre on Military Road, with my work salary continuing for four months.



First day of work, Lewisporte, Summer 1969

First job after graduation: My first experience as a Welfare Officer was the summer of 1969. My first time away from home included working in Lewisporte for three months, one month in Wesleyville, AND boarding in a hotel with the other summer student. It was a wonderful experience! I learned so much, and had to do things I never considered part of the job ... from ordering building materials for a roof to asking clients to pass in their car licence plates if they were looking for short term assistance. Being a summer worker in a small office, you were expected to cover a caseload on your own when the permanent Welfare Officers were on holidays. Fast learning curve for sure. My second summer (1970) was in Corner Brook, a much bigger office and a great learning experience as well.

When our class finished MUN in April 1971, we spent the next six weeks back in the SAME classrooms for in-service training, put off by the Department of Public Welfare for the new grads and workers from the field who they brought in for training. We studied the policy manual - Child Welfare and Social Assistance - with the Directors of the programs. We had tests to see what we knew and by the end of the six weeks you did know policy (or where to find it!).

My first permanent posting was "City Welfare". From June 1971-77 I worked with Social Assistance clients, and they considered us Welfare Officers, even though we were officially called Social Workers from 1972. I carried various caseloads, mostly the downtown area and have so many fond memories of that time.

Subsequent jobs: I transferred to Child Welfare in 1978 and spent 5-6 years covering Child Protection, working with Parents of Children in Care and Foster care, and Adoptions. In those days Social Services was Income Support, Child Welfare or Corrections. From 1983 until I retired in 2005, I worked in various management positions: Supervisor, District Manager of Social Services (St. John's Centre and Mt. Pearl). In 1998 when social workers transferred to Health and Community Services, I moved back to Child Welfare and managed staff during the transition to the newly developed programs, specifically Youth Services. From 1999 until I retired in 2005, I was Director of Youth Services with social work staff working with the older youth and I also covered Community Corrections. All of my paid work life was with Government or Health Boards. I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of my 34.6 years of paid employment. There certainly were lots of challenges along the way, but each one brought an opportunity to learn and grow.

When I retired, I took up volunteering (full-time, not just after hours!) as my new way to give back to my community. I have been actively involved with some organizations on a volunteer basis for over 30 years.



Last day of (paid!) work, Fall 2005

Current description of what I do: I volunteer with the Mt. Pearl Crime Prevention Committee, currently as the Chair. I have been with Girl Guides over 32 years, starting as Brownie Leader in 1987, to Deputy Provincial Commissioner from 2007 to 2012 and numerous other positions along the way. I was Provincial Girl Protection Adviser for many years and served on a National Committee to help write the Girl Protection Protocol in 2007. I'm now "GRAMMY OWL" to 12 Brownies, including my 7-year-old granddaughter. I am on a committee through my church involved with Society and Justice issues and I am a Godly Play story teller for children ages 4 to 10. All of these activities have stemmed from my social work background. Actually my first volunteering was in the mid 1960's with a Head start program on Shea Heights on Saturdays, as well as volunteering at the Waterford Hospital while doing my BA. Working as a volunteer with people (young and old) has kept me connected to many of my work colleagues over the years and up-to-date on various programs offered in the community.

What's your favourite part of being a social worker?

Meeting and working with the hundreds (or more) social workers and clients over my many years of employment and continuing that with people every day as a volunteer in the community. I love interacting with people and know how important it is to show care and concern for all. As social workers we develop empathy and understanding and we hope our clients and fellow workers see this in our daily dealings with them. When someone you worked with "many moons ago" connects with you, remembers you and tells you that you had a positive impact on their life ... that has to be the most rewarding experience of all.

What advice would you give to prospective students considering social work as a profession?

My daughter chose to make social work her career (BSW 2004) and I felt she honoured me by doing this as I must have been a good role model for her. I would give anyone the same advice I gave her: The work is challenging but also rewarding. Look to the small changes in people's lives as they are important steps along the way. Take care of yourself as well, while you are a student or working. Your colleagues are a great support and will be there for you.

There are so many options in terms of career choices today, but if you love working with people, want to be connected to kids, individuals or families who are working through their issues, then consider the social work profession.

Favourite memories of your ...

Class: My class of 1971 was a small group and there was only one Social Welfare course each year for the first couple of years, so we got to know each other in class and socially. In class we were always addressed as Mr. or Miss!

Time at the School of Social Work: As a second degree student in 1984, I had been working for 13 years and like the rest of the class, we hadn't studied or done courses in many years. "Can I do this?" was prevalent thinking among us! Some of us did work together in the workplace, so we supported each other through our initial "nerves". All my papers were completed by taking a day or so annual leave from work and then long days in the library. I do remember that the grades I had back in 1967-71 were definitely in the past (and to be forgotten!) and only "A" grades were on my agenda as a more experienced student.

Time at Memorial: Being a full-time student from 1967 to 1971, age 16 to 20, I was young and carefree! Compare this to 13 years later, a part-time, second degree student with 2 young children, a full-time, demanding work position, one or two classes a week at night, studying late at night and everything else that goes with parenting and university ... both experiences at MUN were very different and unique. Everything I experienced was meant to teach and assist me to be the person I was for the rest of my work journey and who I am today.

Did you take on subsequent education? If so, what and where?

While I was working I availed of any training or workshops offered, ranging from Emergency Social Services training in Ontario, to various management and leadership courses. Most of my volunteer activities provide opportunities for education and skills training and I try to attend everything that is applicable: E module training with Guiding, day-long seminars on Crime Prevention initiatives, workshops on community justice issues and the list goes on ... you have to keep learning!

Any personal or professional highlights or milestones you'd like to share?

I have been acknowledged for my community work and volunteering. Girl Guides awarded me numerous medals: the Silver Merit Award, Medal of Merit, Provincial Pitcher Plant, Certificate of Dedicated Service, Letter of Commendation, plus my 30-year pin.

I also received the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002 and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.



I think the two awards that left me stuck for words (not usually me!) were when I was nominated for and received the Citizen of the Year Award for the City of Mt. Pearl in 2008, for the many years of volunteering, but concentrating on the previous year. In 2012 when I finished my term as Deputy Provincial Commissioner, Girl Guides, Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Council, I was truly humbled to be awarded the Beaver Award. This award is given for exceptional service at the provincial or national level.

While I appreciate all the awards I have received over the years I do not volunteer for recognition or public acknowledgement. The satisfaction I get from being involved with the community is what keeps me motivated and connecting with people provides such positive energy.

As a final note, I volunteered to be part of the 50th Celebration of the School of Social Work to help with locating and contacting alumni and spread the word about the planned activities for the weekend of Oct. 12 to 14th, 2018. What a fun trip down memory lane! We all have so many stories to share about our time at MUN, our work life, the friends and colleagues who mean so much to us and of course our retirement (if we are there). What a great way to encourage anyone to consider studying social work at MUN ... come celebrate our past 50 years!

