



The Greens (WA)
30th Anniversary History Project
[1990-2020]

An interview with:

Ms MARGO BEILBY



[Margo in 2019 on the steps of the WA Parliament with Health Minister Roger Cook on the passing of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill, with a picture of her husband Mike]

5th May 2020 at the Greens (WA) office in Perth

The Greens (WA) acknowledge that First Nations peoples, as the original inhabitants of this country, have a special cultural and spiritual connection with the land and water. We believe that their rights and responsibilities as owners and custodians must be respected.

We hold that First Nations peoples have a right to self-determination and political representation, and must be partners in the development and implementation of public policies, programs and services that affect them.

This interview was recorded on Noongar land and the Greens (WA) acknowledge that these lands were stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

INTERVIEWER

David Worth, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

TRANSCRIBER

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NOTES TO READERS

FULL CAPITALS in the text indicate a word or words emphasised by the interviewee.

Square brackets [] are used for insertions not in the original recording.

INTERVIEW DISCLAIMER

This is a near verbatim interview, meaning that the transcript follows natural speech patterns. Readers should be aware that how we speak may differ greatly from how we would write and that the evolution of everyday language and speech patterns also provides valuable insight into the culture and history of a place.

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INTRODUCTION

Ms Margo Beilby was a founding member of the Greens (WA) in January 1990 after joining one of its predecessors, the WA Green Party, the previous year.

In the 1980s, Margo, her husband and their two sons were very active in the campaign to stop the logging of WA's old growth forests. Over her 30 years membership she has been Co-convenor of the Greens (WA) twice as well as Secretary. Margo has also held the position of National Secretary of the Australian Greens. Her main commitment in the Party has been as the Convenor of the Policy Working Group- a position she took up in early 2000.

Margo and her husband Mike were key members since 1990 of the Canning Regional Group and then the Burt-Canning Regional Group. She has fulfilled the role of polling booth coordinator for many elections, as well as staffing polling booths on polling days. Margo and Mike are both Life Members of the Party.

After Mike's passing, Margo was very active with the Dying with Dignity group and the campaign to support the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill*, which passed the WA Parliament in 2019.

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TRANSCRIPT

Interviewed by David Worth on 5 May 2020.

[00:00:01] DW: Okay, this is an interview with Margo Beilby recorded on Tuesday, the 5th of May at 1:00 pm. So, Margo, if you just want to say a few things, I'll just check the microphone levels.

BEILBY: All right. My name is Margo Beilby. Actually, officially, my name is Margaret Beilby. Right. But my parents christened me Margaret and then called me Margo. [chuckles]

DW: To confuse people. Now ... actually mine, yes the needle looks okay. ... So, Margo, thanks very much for giving up your time today to help with our history project.

DW: And as I said, you're the first [interviewee]. And it's very appropriate, given your long experience in the Greens. I'm just wondering if you could just start off talking a little bit about yourself, where you were born and when? And we'll take it from there.

BEILBY: Right. I was born in Broome in 1940. My father was a fleet manager of a pearling fleet. And then in 1942, my mother and I were evacuated because the Japs [Japanese] were coming. And after the war - Dad joined the airforce - and after the war, he bought a farm in Denmark. And we went down there. Farming was not a successful move. And when he was offered a job back in Broome in the pearling industry, he was on the first plane, I think back there.

So we went back to Broome and I grew up in Broome. And when it came to high school, in those days, the nearest high school was Geraldton. And so my parents had the choice of sending me to Geraldton High School and living in the hostel there, or going to a boarding school in Perth. And seeing I had relatives all over the place in Perth and none in Geraldton, they decided. So I went to PLC [Presbyterian Ladies' College] ...

DW: Right.

BEILBY: ...except for one interesting year when I was in year 11. My mother had done a year of exchange in New South Wales and got friendly with an English woman. And Mum decided, seeing that I was obviously boy mad and was going to get married very young, I'd need to do travelling before I got married. So she arranged with Mrs Nisbet for me to go to Scotland for my year 11 and go to school with her kids.

I spent a year going to the Greenock Academy and then came back and did year 12 at PLC. Then went to Teachers' College, where I met my husband-to-be and, and after two years at Teachers' College, we got married. No - two years teaching - two years at Teachers' College, two years teaching, and we got married. And of course, in those wonderful long and far off days I had to resign ...

DW: Yes.

BEILBY: ...when we got married. I know I said to the blokes on my staff, what happens if I don't resign? They can't sack me for getting married. And they just looked me and said, 'It's been tried, Margo. They will post you to Derby and Mike to Albany and then you'll resign.'

DW: Yet it's a common experience. My mother had to resign her job as well when she got married in the 1950s. So, it's very sad for women like yourself who had a career to have to give that up. I'm just wondering, given that you grew up in Broome and then spent a year in Scotland and a bit of time in Denmark, whether that at that age, the natural environment, had any impact.

[00:03:56] **BEILBY:** Oh, yes. Especially my childhood in Broome. Broome was a wonderful place to have a childhood. We went swimming down in the mangroves and collecting shells on the reefs. And my father and sister were mad at fishing. I was never interested in fishing. And then in Denmark, I love Denmark. My mother hated it. And I was just sort of interested, and Mike was too, I mean, every holidays when we were married, we would toss the kids into the van and tear off and either camp down on the South West or, because he was madly interested in model planes, model boats, and full sized boats, we would most Christmas holidays... we'd drive across to the Eastern States to go in national competitions for Mike.

We travelled a lot. And in 1975, we had this absolutely fabulous year because Mike had long service leave. At that time he would either have six months on half pay or twelve months on full pay. No, sorry, six months on full pay or twelve months on half pay. And because I had been teaching at St Mary's Church of England Girl's School, which didn't have a thing about the fact that I was a temporary teacher, we decided we could afford twelve months on half pay. So we grabbed the kids who were eight and ten at the time and shot off to England, bought a motor caravan and spent a fabulously year driving around the UK and Europe. And before we left, everybody said, well, you're both teachers, you can teach them yourselves, can't you? Yes, we said, maybe.

DW: So you said you had two sons?

BEILBY: Yes. And one who survives. Actually, it was the older son, the one who is now dead, who, actually got us into forest protests. Craig got arrested down in Giblett Block for standing in front of bulldozers. And Gary set up an e-mail list, the NVDA [nonviolent direct action] email list for all the forest protesters and people interested. I remember one person commenting about Wilson Tuckey, (who I think was Minister for Forests at the time¹), "I think he's a cupboard green because every time he opens his mouth, more people join the Greens" [laughs].

DW: Right. Your children, they were more involved in that forest issue at that time, or did they get their ideas from you and Mike, your husband?

BEILBY: Oh, a bit of both. I think Craig went down because there was a party down there and got involved and they ended up camping in the forest. And, as I said, standing in front of bulldozers when they were loading [timber onto trucks] and that sort of thing. But yes, I mean, you know, the whole family is interested in that sort of thing.

DW: Going back to your Mum and Dad as you were growing up, were they involved in politics at all or had views about politics or did they talk to you about political issues?

¹ Liberal Minister for Forestry and Conservation from 1998 to 2001. He angered conservation groups through his support for the forestry industry. In 2002 he blamed the environmentalist movement for Australia's severe bushfire problem, saying that their opposition to controlled burning in national parks increased the risk of fires. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilson_Tuckey

BEILBY: Nope, nope, nope. I strongly suspect my mother voted Labor and my father voted Liberal. So politics was never discussed in our household. Mum came from a very, very working class family. Her brother worked on the wharves. And Dad came from a more middle class family, his father actually worked for C.Y. O'Connor² as an engineer and a surveyor. So they never talked about politics. And I just sort of got interested, and Mike and I got interested, but not very much until we joined the Greens. I think we both probably voted Labor most elections until the Dems [Australian Democrats] came along and then we voted Democrat. And then Mike said, 'Oh, they're starting this Green Party. Do you think we should join?'

DW: What year would that have been?

BEILBY: 1989.

DW: '89, so that would have been the WA Greens.

BEILBY: Yes.

DW: Before they merged and formed the Greens (WA) [in 1990].

BEILBY: Yes, yes, that's right.

DW: And going through school, did you have any mentors or friends who were interested, especially in Broome, about the environment, about water quality?

BEILBY: No, not really. It just sort of gradually grew. I mean, Mike was interested and I was interested. And we just got more and more interested. Living in Collie was interesting because I was posted to Collie when I first started teaching, Collie High School. And then Mike got transferred to Collie and they promptly posted me back to Perth. Mike was teaching at Wilson Park [now Collie Senior High School] in Collie until after we were married. We were down there. And of course, that was 1960 when I started teaching there.

And in '62, after we got married, that was all the time of the coal strike and closing down one of the mines and the town being emptied because when the mine was closed down and most of the people who lived there worked in mines. Yes. So that got us a bit interested in politics. And in college, the environment.

DW: Was your teaching at a primary level or a high school level?

[00:10:04] **BEILBY:** It was high school level. Both Mike and I were sent to university by Teachers' College. Mike failed two subjects. I passed all my subjects, but not well enough to be sent back to university again, because if you did an Arts course you had to get two Bs and two Cs to be sent back to university. And I got one B and three Cs. But because I said that the next year, as my special subject at Teachers' College ~~in the next year~~ on advice from a friend, I said I wanted to do botany at university. And they were desperately short, she'd told me this, they were desperately short of biology teachers. So I got put into a secondary group and sent out to Collie High School as a teacher.

DW: Teaching biology as well as other things?

² Charles Yelverton O'Connor, (11 January 1843 – 10 March 1902), was an Irish engineer who is best known for his work in Western Australia, especially the construction of Fremantle Harbour and the pipeline to Kalgoorlie for the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._Y._O%27Connor

BEILBY: Biology and science and physiology and hygiene. And Mike was put into a primary group at Teachers' College. He decided he didn't like adolescents anyhow. [laughs] He did a prac. at Pinjarra Primary School where everything went wrong and he came back saying, 'No Primary for me!'

DW: Right. And I suppose then being in Collie, and an interest in biology and you're amongst the forest there, that helps your interest grow a little bit.

BEILBY: Oh, yes. Absolutely. I remember I had a little aquarium and there was what I assumed was a gilgie³. Kids brought me fish and things. And there was a gilgie and one boy went over to this little aquarium and said, 'That's not a gilgie, that's a marron'. And I said, 'Oh, really? How do you know?' He said, 'Because my father's the fisheries inspector'. Oh, right. And he said, 'It's illegal to keep marron in an aquarium. You can keep gilgies, you can't keep marron'. And I said, 'Oh, well, would you like to sort of take it and drop it back in the river for me and get me a gilgie'? [laughs].

DW: You talked before Margo about enjoying your travel with your husband. And you also went for a year in Scotland to high school. Did you and Mike have an interest in travel after you graduated?

BEILBY: Yes. Well, actually, we had arranged to take a year without pay and go to England and both get jobs teaching. And then I found I was pregnant, so we didn't go. But as soon as we could afford to go, we went. We spent a year in '75, about eight months in '86 and six months in '96. And the '96 year was fabulous because we swapped our house in Roleystone for a canal boat and spent six months touring round the English canals while the English couple lived in our house and had our cars. They galloped up to Coral Bay and went here and went there. They had a wonderful year. We had a wonderful year.

DW: You mentioned you were teaching at Collie- when did you move to Roleystone?

BEILBY: Well, when I found I was pregnant, I said to my husband, 'I am not going to wash nappies in Collie. Can we get a transfer?' So he said that Collie's winters were upsetting his asthma. And he applied for a transfer to Perth. Came up to Perth, and I taught at St Mary's Church of England's Girls School for a while. And then he started after a promotion, and he got promoted to Geraldton Primary School as a Deputy Headmaster. So we went up to Geraldton and we were there for some years.

And then we, well, because the boys were getting to the stage of going to high school, we thought we'd rather be in Perth. And anyhow that Geraldton southerly got me down. And so Mike got a transfer to East Maddington Primary School. And we bought a block in Roleystone and built our own passive solar house, which I designed, on the block. And that was in 1980... '81. And I've been there ever since.

DW: And you're right at the cutting edge at that date in terms of passive solar... people having an interest in lowering energy use in the house.

[00:15:04] **BEILBY:** Mmmm. Well, my sister and I had an arrangement, our birthdays are a week apart. And she was in Victoria and I was in Western Australia. And for a while we started sending each other cheques and realizing that this was ridiculous. So we had this

³ A small freshwater crayfish common in the South West of WA. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherax_quinquecarinatus

agreement that each birthday we would go and buy ourselves something that we wanted and then write to each other and say, 'you have just bought me ...'. And I went down to Boans [department store] in Geraldton and found a book called *The Wise House*⁴.

DW: Right.

BEILBY: And I thought, oh, this looks interesting. And I took it home and found out all about passive solar design. And we got very, very interested in that to the extent that when Alannah MacTiernan was Planning Minister, here, Mike gave her a hard time about planning decisions and passive solar.

DW: And that would have been about the time that people were looking at solar hot water heaters as well, instead of electric or gas?

BEILBY: Yes. Well, that was interesting, too, because we looked into solar hot water. And at that time, it sort of didn't make sense. It was so expensive. And then Mike had some sailing buddies down at the Geraldton building company and he was walking around the building company with a guy who is one of the top brass in the building company and he saw a solar hot water system leaning against the wall. He said, 'Oh, you sell those do you?' And this guy said, 'No, we don't. Not in Geraldton because Geraldton water rips the guts out of hot water systems. So we've just stopped selling them'. And Mike said, 'Well, why have you got that one there?' And he said, 'Well, we don't know what to do with it. We can't send it back to the makers'. And Mike said, 'Well, how much do you want for it?' And we bought it, supercheap, [laughs] because we knew that we were coming down to Perth and we didn't have to worry about Geraldton water. And so we had a very early solar hot water system.

DW: So building a house on a new block must have taken a lot of your time. And you were teaching at the same time?

BEILBY: We built the house with builders. We didn't build it. We subcontracted that. We built it over the Christmas holidays because Mike said he wanted to be in the house by the time school started. We came down, we did a house sit for a couple in Lesmurdie who were going to the Eastern States. We lived in their house in Lesmurdie and looked after their cats while we were building the house. And we spent every day on-site supervising and helping and doing things, and we managed to move into the house before school started.

DW: And your children must have found it fantastic living up in the hills like that.

BEILBY: Oh, yes. Yes.

DW: And therefore, in terms of your career, you continued as a teacher until retirement?

BEILBY: Well, no, actually, because of this business with the Education Department being difficult. I started a screen printing business at one stage when we are in Geraldton and started off printing little satin thingummies for the yacht club and then gradually built up, and T-shirts and so on. And I ran that for a while, but at a bit of a loss, frankly. Although I did quite well with contacting sporting groups in country areas and doing T-shirts for them, I can remember, did a whole lot of T-shirts for the Pilbara Baseball Club or something. This

⁴ *The Wise House: Adapting Your Home To The Australian Climate* by Tom Jenkins, January 1978.

sort of thing, and I said, you know, that I'd guarantee to get them the shirts in time. And so on. But then not making much money at it.

I found out that... I started doing an art course at Armadale Tech [Technical College]. And then I transferred to Forrestfield Tech. And money problems started to come up because we'd invested in housing in '87 and we reckon we caused the stock market crash because we started buying shares. And suddenly the bottom fell out of the market. So we started buying houses and then interest rates went [up], we were paying 19.9% interest at one stage on THREE houses.

I said to Mike, 'Well, I could always go back to teaching'. And Mike said, 'Well, we wouldn't employ you'. Oh, thanks. And he said, 'Well, you're only two-year trained'. Terrific. He said, 'But they're very, very short of art teachers' and you're doing this art course. By that stage, I was doing a preliminary certificate in art and design. And he said, 'Why don't you try and talk them into taking you on as an art specialist'.

So I went into the Education Department and presented all the work that I'd been doing at Tech. And I was towards the end of what would have been a one-year course full time and I'd done it over several years. And this woman in the Education Department, said, 'Well, when would you want to start teaching?' And I said, 'Well, I presume next year, because I'm doing four subjects at Tech at the moment and I want to finish those to finish the course. Why?' And she said, 'because there's a job coming up on Thursday' [laughs].

DW: Great timing.

[00:20:54] **BEILBY:** And so I rang the headmaster, because there's somebody going on long service leave and they had nobody to replace her. And it was part time, which is what I wanted. So I rang the headmaster and I said, 'When when would you want me?' And he said, 'Wednesday afternoon, Thursday and Friday'. And I said, 'Well, that works pretty well because the courses I'm doing at Tech are Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday morning'.

DW: Fantastic.

BEILBY: So I started as an art specialist at Kardinya [Primary School]. And then at the end of the year, the next year I went to Langford. And then to Guilford Primary School as an art specialist. And I stayed at Guilford until I retired in '95.

DW: Wow. Fantastic in terms of opportunities at the right time. It's great. So you're living in the Hills, Roleystone, teaching at Guilford and having these issues around, under Paul Keating as [Federal] Treasurer, of the recession we had to have and the high interest rates. What then inspired you to join the Greens? You said you joined the WA Greens in '89?

BEILBY: Well, because of the work we'd been doing on the forest protests and we'd got interested in that. There was this interesting bike ride that my son and his friend got involved in where a whole group of young people on bikes, caught the Australind [train] down to Bunbury, took a woodchip from the woodchip piles on the Port there, and then rode their pushbikes from Bunbury to Shannon Dam to throw that woodchip back into the forest. Very symbolic. And we decided we were not up to riding up the hill from Bunbury to Shannon Dam. But we went along in our campervan to keep an eye on the boys. And to be involved in the whole thing.

So that was in '82. And that was a big moment. And we sort of got more and more involved in forest protests. So when the Greens... we found out there was this Green Party, we thought, yes, well, we'll join the Greens. And of course, it was only supposed to be, you know, just members and not doing anything. I joined the Greens and then I let it take over my life [laughs].

DW: With the forest movement, because a number of the members of the Greens around Australia come from movements like the forest movement. That must've taken quite a bit of time as well, because it was quite controversial in those days under Charlie Court as the [Liberal] Premier. Did it have any impact on your life in terms of your teaching, being involved with these sorts of groups?

BEILBY: No. If you're a teacher, you don't have anything to do with politics. The most I did was when I was at Guilford, my timetable... because I was half time I think I had to have nine hour periods a week and there were only eight classes. So I had to do something in the remaining time slot and I started a permaculture garden at the school and one of the teachers got very interested in that. And the theory was that I took her class for an hour while she did some other job around the school, instead of which she did the job in her own spare time. And she helped me with the permaculture garden, and we grew a permaculture garden. And she used it as part...

I know at one stage I was putting a whole lot of stuff on the blackboard because when the kids start throwing stones at each other, I'd say, right, we're going back into the classroom. And I'd start what they thought was the garden class lessons. And I thought, was actually science stuff. And I covered the blackboards with a whole lot of stuff. And I started to rub it off. And Alexie said, 'Don't rub that off. I base my work for the next week on the stuff that you do in this class. And she based writing and art and everything on the work that we did in the garden class. So that was a lot of fun.

DW: And I would imagine your community around your house in Roleystone would also be supportive of your designing houses properly, permaculture, solar energy and so on?

[00:25:22] **BEILBY:** Some of them.

DW: No?

BEILBY: Some of them.

DW: So you were out a bit ahead of the pack then in terms of these ideas. Did that create any conflict with the...?

BEILBY: No, oh no, I get on very well with my neighbours. We don't discuss politics.

DW: So you joined the WA Greens in 1989, just before the merger, in January 1990. And...

BEILBY: What merger?

DW: The merger of the four groups into the WA Greens.

BEILBY: Yes.

DW: I'm just wondering whether over that time since then, have you been members of any other political party or has it just been the Greens?

BEILBY: No, there was one time when I was Secretary of the party and Karl Haynes and Stewart Jackson were Co-convenors, and Pat Gandini was Treasurer and one of the One Nation MLCs in [the WA] Parliament said that all the office bearers in the Greens were ex-communists. And I was away when this was said. And I came back and I said, 'I object to that, I've never been a member of any political party until I joined the Greens'. And Stewart said, 'Well, it's a good thing you can say that. Because Karl and Pat Gandini had been communists, too'.

DW: Well, political parties are a bit more formal than forest and logging groups that you were involved with before. How did you find the formal processes of having meetings and elections, and dealing with the Constitution?

BEILBY: Well, I know I took the Constitution with me once when we went over to the Eastern States and I read it through marking all the places where we were breaching the Constitution. So I got involved in changing the Constitution. And I really didn't have anything much to do with the party until, virtually until I [later] resigned.

Although, because Roleystone at that stage was in [the Federal seat of] Pearce and the Pearce Greens met in Mundaring and we weren't going to drive through the Hills at night, with kangaroos and all. So we didn't go to any meetings. We didn't get involved very much in any way until I started teaching at Guildford Primary School. And I found out by that stage the Pearce Greens were meeting in Midland and Maida Vale.

So the night of meetings I would stay at school and do work at school. I'd grab a sandwich, go to the meeting and then drive home. And so I sort of got involved I think with the election when Christabel [Chamarette] lost her Senate seat [in 1996]. And then someone at the [election] de-brief talked me into getting the Canning Greens going. So I started getting involved more.

And then at that stage we had an email chatlist. Somebody from the South West said something on the chatlist and I said, 'That's against Greens policy, Dom'. And he said the Greens don't have any policies. And I went, 'What?' And I checked with Stewart Jackson [Greens' Convenor]. He said, 'He's quite right, we haven't, because the Constitution then required that all policies had to be balloted to all members to be ratified'. And they'd had a couple of goes at it and that had failed.

So I thought, well, we're going to have policies. So I gathered a group of like-minded people and we started having meetings and we decided that we would concentrate just on the four pillars and have a policy on Social Justice, on Participatory Democracy, Peace and Nonviolence and Ecological Sustainability or whatever. And so I was put in charge of Social Justice. Karl Haynes took Participatory Democracy. The then-Secretary, Paul Smith, and a guy called Shane Guthrie took Peace and Nonviolence. And the person who took Ecological Sustainability did nothing. So that didn't happen. But we got the first three policies ratified.

Then Rachel [Siewart] came on board later and she got the last one ratified. And then after that ... because somebody had got shrewd and said, right, 'We have to ballot policies. We'll have something we call platforms'. And that was on, you know, everything under the sun. And so we continued as a Policy Working Group by that stage, developing and

working on and improving the platforms, which we ended up calling detailed policies and changing the Constitution to fit.

And I was policy convener for, I can't remember how long I continued as as policy convener, and then I let it go and got on with something else because I was running for elections, Co-convenor with Karl, Co-convenor with Alison [Xamon], Secretary and for a while National Secretary. And I was still very involved with the Policy Working Group but it wasn't until last year that I put my hand up again to be policy convenor.

DW: You were a convenor of the Burt-Canning Regional Group around '96 - '97. Was that the first time you took like a formal position within the party?

[00:31:27] **BEILBY:** Oh. Probably.

DW: And that's when you would have got some interest in developing policies or was that later?

BEILBY: Oh no my interest in policies came before, long before the Burt Canning Greens. I mean, the Burt Canning Greens only developed when Burt became a Federal seat. It looks like we're going to lose it. And most irritating when I found that, I am personally in Canning and not in Burt, because if I was in Burt, I'd have Matt Keogh [ALP] as my Federal member, instead of which in Canning I have Andrew Hastie [Liberal Party].

DW: The Liberal, yes. With your involvement in the Canning Regional Group, it's interesting, looking back on the original constitution from 1990, that that was one of the important points for the Greens, that they have these Regional Groups that the members joined to discuss policies. But other things like the Reps Council, the Election Campaign Committee were all there in the beginning, and still survive 30 years later. So many of those things, like consensus decision making, must have been important.

BEILBY: Oh, yes.

DW: Probably a bit of hard work, but it ended up holding people to ...

BEILBY: I know when I first started going to Pearce meetings and I found this consensus thing and I thought, come on, it's never going to work. And I got converted. And I've realized now, at Reps, for example, I can remember Reps going to a vote less than half a dozen times, and each time it was not a very successful process. I mean, sometimes I must admit, sometimes it's consensus by exhaustion. But if you can get consensus, it's so much better than voting.

One of the problems of the policy Loomio⁵ is that it's based on a voting thing. But, you know, it's still consensus, it still works fairly well. Actually being Convener, I'm not sure I was ever Convenor [of the Reps Council] was I? I mean permanent rep. Again I remember at one stage, because I'd been two years as permanent rep and the Constitution says you could only have a position for two years. So we talked Mike into being permanent rep. And at every Reps meeting I'd say, well, 'Mike's an apology. He's not well. And I'm taking his place'. Mike would be off flying a model plane or something.

⁵ Loomio is a software product used by the Greens (WA) to make it easier for members to collaborate and make decisions without meeting in person. See https://help.loomio.org/en/guides/western_australian_greens_case_study/

DW: So according to my records you became party Co-convenor in 2000, for that first two year period, 2000 to 2002, and then back again in 2007. What type of tasks were you involved with as Co-convenor?

[00:34:14] **BEILBY:** Well, I became... Karl Haynes talked me into being Co-convenor because we had a very tricky situation where a guy joined the Greens. We're not quite sure how he managed it. And then we found out that he was out on appeal [from jail] for interfering with a minor. And he used to come to Policy Working Group meetings and he and his partner put their hand up to do the law and order policy, and I didn't know about this, and Giz [Watson] found out that he was out on appeal.

And meetings were in her office. And she said, 'I don't want that man in my office'. And we had all the problem. And his partner was Co-convenor with Paul Llewellyn. And Karl approached me and said, 'Look, we've got to stop this'. He said, 'I want to run as co-convenor and I want you to run with me'. Oh, right. Okay [said a bit querulously]. So, I was Co-convenor with Karl. And then with Miguel Castello. And then later I was, Co-convenor with Alison [Xamon]. I think Alison talked me into it. And then Dee O'Neill.

And somewhere along the line, I'm not quite sure where, I was Secretary. I know I was Secretary when we joined the Australian Greens because I took the common seal across to the [national] conference in Canberra [October 2003], when we finally, finally after, I think it was third time, we'd had a go at joining the Australian Greens and each time had been knocked back by ballot in Western Australia. But it just squeaked through this time. I got there and found out that, there was, I think it was problems about Ansett [Airlines] or something. I know I arrived on the Saturday morning of the conference and Karl picked me up, I think, or Stewart [Jackson] picked me. I can't remember. And told me that there was a bit of a difficulty because Drew Hutton from Queensland was going to blackball the Western Australian Greens, because he didn't want us to join the Greens.

DW: Right. That whole process of bringing the Green groups together across Australia just seems so fraught because, as you said, there was an earlier time around '92 where there was a process of trying to bring everyone together. And WA Greens didn't join at that stage. Were you involved in the discussions later on about bringing the Greens from W.A. into the National Greens?

BEILBY: Yes, I was on the working group that was working to join it, and my husband wrote the No case. Because I found out that Miguel Castello was going to write the No case because he was totally opposed to joining the Australian Greens. And I said to Mike, 'Look, Miguel's lack... English is very much his second language. And he doesn't understand computers. How about you giving him a hand?' And Mike said, 'Oh, yeah, okay, I'll help him'. He said, 'Because I'm not very impressed with the Australian Greens, anyhow'. And then Miguel had a car accident. Well, he was run over in Newcastle Street. He was crossing the road and the car backed into him and he was in hospital. So Mike ended up writing the No case, with me giving him information. So Mike wrote the No case and then voted yes.

DW: So people like Miguel, was there opposition to joining the other Green parties in Australia based on that it would make things too formal or they didn't like how other political parties worked nationally?

BEILBY: I don't know, just West Australians being West Australian, I think. A lot of it. As I said, I think there was three ballots on joining the Australian Greens and the first two

failed. And then finally, we just squeaked in. And as I said, Drew Hutton was going to blackball us, having gone through all that. The main move to join at that stage was that Bob [Brown] was threatening to come over here to form an Australian Greens Party in Western Australia. So there would have been the Greens (WA) and the Australian Greens in Western Australia, and that would have been a disaster.

DW: Incredibly confusing for the public.

BEILBY: Oh, yes. And anyhow, apparently, Bob and Giz took Drew into a corner and convinced him that he was not to attempt to blackball us. And we joined the Australian Greens, which caused quite a lot of confusion, because before that time, we had policies. I mean, we had effectively national policies. We had policies on tax, we had policies on population, we had policies on superannuation. And after we joined the Australian Greens, we realised, well, actually, those are national issues and we'll let the Australian Greens deal with that and we'll concentrate on things that are WA issues.

DW: And would have been more important during a State election?

BEILBY: Oh, yes. Yes.

DW: You became our party Secretary, according to my notes, in 2003 and 2004. Is that a day to day job, or is it once again a job you do voluntarily as well as...

[00:40:06] **BEILBY:** What is that, party Secretary in GWA?

DW: In Greens (WA), yes.

BEILBY: Yeah, because I know, well, by that stage, Mike and I were volunteering a day a week in the Greens office. And so I did a lot of the Secretary work and and I actually sort of effectively became membership officer at that time too. And yes, it was, I mean, people say, 'You know, you do all this stuff for nothing. You don't get paid. Do you get petrol?' No, I just do it.

DW: Because you love doing it. And then you also became Policy Working Group Co-convenor, slightly earlier than that...

BEILBY: About 2000. Yes.

DW: ...about '99 through to 2010. Once again, a very long period to be involved with all those meetings and getting policies together, revising them I suppose every election?

BEILBY: Yep. Yes.

DW: Making sure they're up to date and going through meetings based on consensus. But you kept very positive about that approach and involving people.

BEILBY: Oh yes. Yes. Mind you, I must admit until this year, mainly, I tried to get people interested in looking at the policies and doing something about revising them. And people would go, 'Oh yeah, yeah, okay'. And then suddenly the party would sort of go, 'Oh, it's November, we've got an election in March. We've got to revise the policies'. And they tended to send the whole lot out to groups and say, 'Approve the lot or else' sort of business.

And some of them weren't looked at very closely. The one that's a complete mess [now] is Heritage. You should have a look at the Heritage policy. It's a mess. I don't know who drafted that, but obviously just sort of people went, Heritage, well, that's not terribly important. Tick.

DW: How many members are on the Policy Working Group to help you go through this process.

BEILBY: I think it's 141. But not all of them engage because I know my son is on the Policy Working Group Loomio. And I say to him every now and then, 'Do you get any of the notifications I send out?' And he says, 'I think my computer puts them into a file that I never look at'.

DW: The junk folder. [chuckles] Oh, that's very sad. Are you still personally particularly focused on the environmental policies or now you've had all this experience across the board range you feel comfortable ...

BEILBY: Well, actually, the funny thing is I got, first of all, interested as I said, I took on the core policy of Social Justice and I used to get irritated when people say, 'Yes, but you're an environment party, aren't you?' And I said, 'If you have a look at our policies, you'll find there's only about half a dozen environment policies. And most of them are social justice policies'. And, of course, I'm interested in education.

DW: Along the way, you know, State governments have made changes, especially in the environment element, [Premier] Geoff Gallop, and the changes to the logging of old growth forests. So you do need to move on and update them, recognizing those changes have happened.

BEILBY: Yeah, well, every now and then. At the moment, I'd say the present measures are such and such and somebody says, 'But that's out of date. That Bill's been passed. Oh right, let's change that'.

DW: When you're involved in that way with the Policy Working Group, Secretary and Convenor, would you be working five days a week on Greens issues?

BEILBY: Just about, yes.

DW: And Mike as well?

BEILBY: Oh, no, no. As I said, Mike worked one day a week in the Greens office and then in Alison's office. But apart from that, Mike spent his time making things and doing things and flying planes and sailing model boats. Mike has been in... at 17 he sailed in a national yachting championships in Sydney as a forwardhand. He's sailed in model yacht nationals. He sailed in a model yacht international fleet in '75, no, '86 it must have been. That's model yachts.

And then model planes. He's flown nationally and internationally. So, yes, doing things with his hands. I know when he retired, I went down to his school and one of the women sidled up to me and said, 'What's it like having Mike home all day?' And I said, 'Well, actually not very different. I said, he gets up in the morning and has breakfast and goes out to the shed. Comes in, makes himself lunch and goes out to the shed. Comes in and

has tea at half the time goes out to the shed'. I said, 'I don't see any more of him now that he's retired than I did when he was working'.

DW: And were you able to keep up your interest in art while you did your Greens activities as well?

[00:45:46] **BEILBY:** Yes, yes. I went through a phase of quilt making and I actually did quite well. If you go out to Tim's office [Tim Clifford, MLC for East Metro] and ask for it, there's a wall hanging that I made for Scott Ludlam's office, when he was a Senator, based on a poster that Scott did for the Greens. And I made a really big wall hanging for that. And then when Scott had to step down, I said, 'What's going to happen to my wall hanging?' And Tim ended up with it.

DW: We'll have to get a photo of it for our history website. Oh, that's fantastic, because then you move on as well, and not only doing sort of the party work as such, but becoming a candidate for elections. And that must have also taken an enormous amount of time. Your first one was in 1998, a Federal election for the seat of Canning. That's a massive amount of work?

BEILBY: Yes, and almost completely on my own. Mike didn't even help me on that one. And I didn't do much campaigning. I mean, for heaven's sake... Canning. I tried to get to things and do things. The main job I did with elections was organizing people to do booths on election day.

DW: To hand out how to votes?

BEILBY: Mmm hmm.

DW: But you did also [stand for] the lower house in Roleystone, Darling Range? You must be a bit of an old-hand about knowing what to do in terms of planning an election campaign for people coming through in the Greens?

BEILBY: Yes. Well, then I've helped other people. I mean, my son's ex-girlfriend, who now lives in Roleystone, was [a Greens] candidate for Canning at one election. And I helped a niece with her campaign. And yes. The only time when I wasn't... haven't been involved in election campaigns was when Mike got so sick.

DW: With the campaigns, did you have to do media? And how did you feel about being interviewed, and making comments and statements?

BEILBY: No, that was okay. We had media training. We had various people. I know at one stage somebody came along for media training and said, 'You know, you've got to look professional. You can't have green hair'. I turned to Elena Jeffries, who was our candidate for Perth at that election⁶, I think, and I said, 'Keep the green hair, Elena'.

DW: Because Mike also was a candidate for Southern River in 2005. How did he go?

BEILBY: [laughs] That wasn't his idea because I was supposed to be the candidate for Southern River. And there was this super wonderful female in Kalamunda who was going to be our candidate for Darling Range. And when we were signing up the papers to go into

⁶ 1996 State election. Elena has stood as a Greens' candidate four times.

the WAEC [WA Electoral Commission], she said, 'Do I have to be an Australian citizen?' And we all went, 'Oh, yes!' She said, 'Well, I'm not'.

I can remember Paul Davis said, 'Margo, will you be the candidate for Darling Range?' And I said, 'Yeah, okay, but who's gonna be the candidate for Southern River?' And we all looked at each other and I rang Mike up from the meeting and said, 'Guess who's the candidate for Southern River'. I don't think he visited his electorate until polling day!

DW: But alongside all of that, you've also been booth co-ordinator...

[00:49:43] **BEILBY:** Oh, yeah.

DW: ...for many of the elections. That once again takes a lot of organizing, arranging people.

BEILBY: I think twice I was the booth co-ordinator for the whole of East Metro, where I didn't do all the work. I appointed people to be Bassendean booth co-ordinator and Morley booth co-ordinator and checked up on them to see how they were going and some of them weren't. And, you know, all sorts of things like that. But yes, it was a huge amount of work. And the last by-election for Darling Range I got so little help from the party, I said, 'Right. That's it. I'm not doing that anymore'. Yes.

DW: How are we going this election? Have you got over the Darling Range by-election? Do you think you might also put your hand up?

BEILBY: For what?

DW: Helping out at the State election in terms of managing booths or volunteers?

BEILBY: I'll do a booth. I've got to the stage, somebody else can do all that work. Anyhow, I'm going to be still busy right up to the election, probably, on policies. But the last election, I organized the two booths in Roleystone - the Roleystone Hall and the Roleystone High School - and I worked [handing out how to vote cards] at the high school.

DW: But the party at the moment seems to have quite good processes for training people in terms of [elections] and also calling around to volunteers on a regular basis. Have you seen many changes since 1990 in the way it processes things like that for elections, because obviously as a political party, the idea is to try and win seats?

BEILBY: Oh, I think we're improving all the time. Tremendous amount of, and, of course, the number of members has increased in that time. I remember when we had 350 members. Now we've got well over a thousand. And it goes up and down a bit.

DW: And how many people are in your Regional Group now?

BEILBY: I think it's about 45. Of course, because of the nature of Canning, Burt's okay. But Canning is a mess. I mean people in Mandurah are not going to drive up to Armadale for meetings and people in Armadale can't drive down to Mandurah. And so we effectively don't have face to face meetings.

DW: We have massive seats Federally in WA. Canning's one of them, in terms of distances.

BEILBY: Well, in fact, at a couple of elections, Canning has been treated as a regional seat, although quite a bit of it is in the metro area. But it is a mess. So Burt-Canning actually does all its work on the Burt-Canning Loomio. We put up all the proposals to Reps Council on the Loomio and vote on them. And I must admit, sometimes I go along to Reps meetings and say, 'Burt-Canning has no position at all on this proposal. They're just not interested'. [chuckles]

DW: How do you see the arrangements now between the party as it is today and those movements, you were talking early in the 1980s about the forest movements and the anti-nuclear movements. How is it today do you think, in terms of the party's connections, and connections with members of those groups who might then want to join a political party?

BEILBY: Oh, I think there's very good connections by people like Giz [Watson] and the MLCs staying in contact with all these groups. I know Alison [Xamon] is in contact with whole lots of disability groups and LGBTI groups and various other groups that she keeps in contact with, and brings their views into the party.

DW: What do you think has been the biggest challenge recently for the party in terms of its growth in members and the number of elections? We've got two Senators at the moment, there might be a Federal election campaign in the next year or so...

BEILBY: Yes, next year, I think. One of the biggest problems, although our membership numbers have increased, the engagement of members of the party hasn't increased at the same pace. I get very irritated, when I'm one of... we don't ask very much of our members. The one thing that we do ask of members is that they do a polling booth on election day, and it is amazing how many members won't. And of course, nowadays with work, often because they're working on a Saturday, they can't.

DW: Is that different to previous [elections], like in the 1990s, were people more willing?

[00:55:00] **BEILBY:** Yes. Although we had a lot less members, we managed to staff most of our polling booths although I must admit in Canning, nearly every election, I had to go to the Labor Party and say, 'Look, we can't get anybody to staff... North Dandalup is one of our ones. I don't think we've ever had anybody to staff North Dandalup. And the Labor Party say, 'Well, as you're preferencing us, we'll get ...'

I remember one election I went down to Serpentine and I knew that we didn't have anybody there. But I went down to check up and I saw a guy in a green T-shirt, and I thought that's odd, I didn't think we had anybody here. So I trotted over to this guy and I said, 'Are you handing out for the Greens?' And he said, 'Yes, that's right'. I said, are you a member? He said, 'No, I'm a member of the Labor Party', he said, 'but they gave me the job of handing out for the Greens at Serpentine'. So he said, 'I went through my drawer and found I had a green T-shirt, so I put that on'.

DW: Fantastic story, a fantastic story. Where do you think the main challenges now are in the future for the Greens (WA)? And where do you think it will be in, say ten years time, in terms of membership size or seats?

BEILBY: I don't know. One thing is, although we are more aligned with the Labor Party than the Liberals, the Labor Party does not love us. And and they would get rid of us if they could. And they're very well aware that a lot of their members leave the Labor Party and

join the Greens. So, they're really not impressed with us, especially when we start taking the [Federal] seat of Melbourne, for example, away from them and the possibility of losing some of the inner city seats from Labor to the Greens. So although we're in theory good mates, we're not.

I mean, I got an email from Albo [Albanese, ALP leader] before one election saying, I don't know how he got my email address, but anyhow saying, 'Don't you think it's disgusting that the Greens are preferencing Liberal in some seats in New South Wales?' And when I saw that the email had actually come from Albanese himself and not just from his office, I wrote back and said that is absolute bunkum. As far as I know, the Greens have never, ever preferenced the Liberal Party in any electorate. And it doesn't work like that. It's not a top down decision.

Each Regional Group decides who they're going to preference. I said we have on occasions gone open ticket where we said, you know, if you want a Labor government, vote this way and if you want the Liberal government, vote that way. But, I said the Greens do not preference. I've seen... it's coming up on ~~an~~ Twitter at the moment that the Greens are preferencing a Liberal candidate in one seat in Queensland. And I don't know whether it's true or not. But, yes, as I said, the Labor Party... the funniest was when the Greens office was in the building in Hay Street where there was the union [Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association] was up the top in that building, and people would come into the Greens office and hide so that union members couldn't see that they were there. They'd come in to join the Greens and say, 'Don't tell anybody we're here'.

DW: My gosh. I know that both you and Mike have been made Life Members of the Greens (WA), which is a small recognition of all those years of meetings, and booths [attendance], and working hard as a volunteer. What's it meant personally to you to be a member, and have contributed to the Greens (WA) party?

BEILBY: Oh, well, I've got a huge amount of satisfaction in the work that I've done for the Greens. I think Mike got a lot of satisfaction even though he didn't do as much. But he really appreciated the time that he spent in the Greens, with the result that Alison got up in Parliament on the VAD [Voluntary Assisted Dying] debate and said, 'You know, all of these people'... because I'd sent emails to all the members who might vote in favor of the VAD legislation. And a couple of them read out my emails in Parliament. And Alison got irritated because she thought these people didn't even know much. She said, 'I knew Mike. I knew him well. He worked in my office. He was a curmudgeonly old bugge'r.

DW: The Voluntary Assisted Dying campaign, that's something you and Mike put a lot of effort into as well?

BEILBY: Mike didn't.

DW: Mike didn't?

[01:00:03] **BEILBY:** No. No.

DW: But you did, with the [WA Parliament's] Dying with Dignity Committee being involved with that on the committee?

BEILBY: Yes, it was after Mike died that I got involved.

DW: Right. Okay. But after he died?

BEILBY: I mean, I'd always been in favour of it. And talked to Robin [Chapple- Greens MLC] about it. But until after Mike died, that really started to mean something for me. And I got on the Committee of Dying with Dignity and worked, particularly last year. And one interesting thing, Liam Carter, who's a member of the Greens and worked for Robin, he contacted me and said, 'Look, I'm doing a media course at university and we have to make a film on a story that matters. And I think your story with Mike is the story that matters'. He said, 'Would you be happy to have us make a movie of Mike's story?' And I said, 'Oh, yes, that'd be great'.

I tell you what, I never want to be an actress. This group of young uni students came out and they'd spend all day. They did bring food, and they'd say, 'Now, Margo just walk down that path. Now do it again. Now do it again'. And they finally ended up with this movie- *His Choice*. And when the movies were judged, my son and I went to the presentation and that little movie, *His Choice*, got best documentary, best production, best something else. And the overall prize.

DW: Fantastic. That's fantastic, because obviously it was such an emotional campaign and the parliamentary process of having committee hearings and submissions, and I think we're one of the few States in Australia to now have legislation. I think Victoria has similar legislation?

BEILBY: Yes.

DW: So it's a big achievement to have that go through Parliament. And have it legislated. How much time did you put into that campaign?

BEILBY: Last year? Oh, a heck of a lot of time. And in fact I sort of let the Greens slide for a while last year and worked on the VAD campaign with Robin. And the funniest time was I was at the dentist and my phone rang and I pulled it out and had a look and thought I don't know who this is, so I turned it off. Then it rang again, and I went I still don't know who this is. And finally, when I got out of the dentist's chair and got everything out of my mouth, I thought, I don't know who this was, but I better bring them back.

So I rang back and then this person said, 'Look, this is so-and-so from [Health Minister] Roger Cook's office. I know this is awfully short notice, but could you come up to Parliament House at midday tomorrow because Roger and Malcolm McCusker⁷ are having a presser out in front of Parliament and we want you there to tell your story'.

I thought oh, yeah, okay. I'll drive all the way in from Roleystone and I'll get two seconds on one channel if I'm lucky. So I went in and they ran through and advised me. They said, bring along a wedding photo. So I went along. And so Roger got up and talked about the Bill and what was going to be done and this and that and the other. And then Malcolm McCusker stepped up and said all this stuff. And then Roger said, 'Margo, will you come and tell your husband's story?' So I stepped up and all these journalists converged on me and started asking [questions]. One of the questions that really got me down was, 'Are you related to anybody in the Labor government?' I said, 'Not as far as I know, probably am

⁷ WA's 31st Governor, serving from July 2011 to June 2014. He also served as Chair of the WA Government's Ministerial Expert Panel's consultation on Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation. See <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2019/06/Report-paves-the-way-for-voluntary-assisted-dying-bill.aspx>

because I've got relatives all over this State' and Roger said 'I'd be proud to be related to Margo'.

And I ended up sitting on the steps of Parliament, my wedding photo between my knees with Roger sitting beside me and all these journalists asking questions. And I thought, well, I wonder if any of that will get on the news. Channel Seven, Channel Nine, Channel Ten and the ABC. And it was all me. They practically ignored Roger and Malcolm McCusker. The next time I ran into Malcolm McCusker, I said, 'I'm sorry that they ignored you'. And he said, 'Well, I was rather relieved'.

DW: It must've been a bit hard for Robin Chapple as well in terms of the effort he'd put into that issue as a Greens MP in the Upper House [in 2002 and 2010⁸]. But I suppose he was just very proud that in the end it did get through. And that legislation is now there to be used probably early next year. Is that when it comes into effect?

[01:05:01] **BEILBY:** Oh, yes, 18 months from when the Bill was passed, before they do it. And Dying With Dignity is making sure that they're keeping an eye on the whole implementation process to make sure that it doesn't run off the rails. And of course, the only thing we're worried about is the fact that Nick Goiran [Liberal MLC] has threatened that if the Liberals get in at the next election, they'll try to weaken it or overrule it.

DW: Right.

BEILBY: I just hope they say that before the election because they'll lose a lot of votes if they say that.

DW: There's a lot of public support that having seen family members like you have go through that, that part of your life

BEILBY: Surveys have showed that 88% of Western Australians support the Bill. So, if they say, 'We're going to overturn this Bill if we get in', it won't do them any help at all.

DW: Would you say that is one of your proudest achievements...

BEILBY: Oh, yes.

DW: ...as a Greens member?

BEILBY: Well, it wasn't to do with being a Greens member, really, although it started from [that]. No, it started from my views that this is my right. I know when Mike, in 2013, after Mike's third visit to hospital, when they couldn't do anything for him. And Mike said, 'I think I'll take your mother's way out', because my mother had starved herself to death.

DW: That's terrible.

BEILBY: That was her only option. And I said, well, 'I think we can do better than that'. And he joined Exit International and found out how to import Nembutal and was able to, instead of a TERRIBLE death, I've heard some people have, he drank the stuff down and went to sleep.

⁸ See <https://www.robinchapple.com/voluntary-euthanasia>

DW: Far more peaceful. Well, thank you, Margo. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to add to the interview, given 30 years, a lot to cover in just over an hour. But it's been a fabulous career that you've had with the Greens and a lot of achievements along the way, not just the VAD. Bill. And we're coming up to a State election where hopefully that can continue as well.

BEILBY: Yes. And I hope we, at the State election... I hope we get South Metro back again and I hope we get Mining and Pastoral. But that's a bit of an outside chance, Mining and Pastoral has always been an outside chance for us, and maintain North Metro, East Metro and South West, although the South West is a [problem].

DW: Well, thank you. We will have that to look forward to in March next year, hopefully we'll get some good results. Thanks very much for your time this afternoon. Thanks, Margo.

[01:08:02] **BEILBY:** Right.

END OF TRANSCRIPT