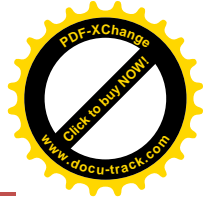
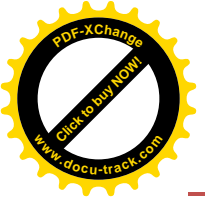


PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY
OIL SANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

GENE BACON GRADUATED FROM JASPER PLACE COMPOSITE HIGH SCHOOL IN EDMONTON AND WAS HIRED BY GREAT CANADIAN OIL SANDS/SUNCOR ON JULY 6TH, 1970. HE HELD VARIOUS POSITIONS BEGINNING AS AN EXTRACTION OPERATOR (NINE YEARS), THEN MOVED TO MINE ADMINISTRATION AND MAINTENANCE PLANNING, A POSITION HE HELD FOR SEVEN YEARS. BACON JOINED THE UNION GREAT CANADIAN OIL SANDS EMPLOYEE BARGAINING ASSOCIATION IMMEDIATELY BECOMING KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING. HE BECAME STEWARD, EXTRACTION OPERATIONS IN OCTOBER 1971 AND SERVED FOR OVER SIX YEARS AND WAS SECRETARY OF THE MCMURRAY INDEPENDENT OIL WORKERS FOR OVER THREE YEARS. HE PARTICIPATED IN THE UNION NEGOTIATING COMMITTEES. IN 1979, BACON BECAME A STAFF MEMBER OF SUNCOR AND WORKED IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES, INITIALLY AS A COST ANALYST AND EVENTUALLY AS AREA SUPERVISOR, MINE ADMINISTRATION, AND FINALLY, AS A LABOUR RELATIONS SPECIALIST. HE SERVED AS PART OF THE COMPANY NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE. UNDER MIKE SUPPLE, HE DEVELOPED A PLANT PERFORMANCE PLAN INCLUDING PERFORMANCE MEASURES. SUBSEQUENTLY, HE BECAME MANAGER, LABOUR RELATIONS FOR THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT, A POSITION HE HELD FOR TWO YEARS. AFTER THIS, HE WORKED AS THE SENIOR LABOUR RELATIONS CONSULTANT FOR FIVE YEARS. HE RETIRED FROM SUNCOR ON AUGUST 31ST, 2004.



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DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: 1949 in Fairview, Alberta

Date and Place of Interview: 1 pm June 19th, 2012 at the Bacon residence below.

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Consent form signed: Yes Initials of Interviewer: AD

Transcript reviewed by Interviewee: Yes

Last name of subject: BACON

AD: My name is Adriana Davies, and I'm a researcher/interviewer on the Petroleum History Society Oil Sands Oral History Project. It is June the 18th, 2012, and I'm interviewing Gene Bacon, who worked for Suncor. Gene, thanks so much for agreeing to this interview. It's now eight minutes to 1 p.m. and we are in Gene's home. Gene, could you just introduce yourself and tell me your place and date of birth, and also a summary biography, and then we'll get into the specifics after that.

GB: Okay. My name is Gene Bacon. I was born in a little town in the Peace River Country, called Fairview, in 1949. Spent my younger days on a homestead there. Moved to Fort St. John, started school there, other than two weeks when I went to school on horseback on the farm. Spent about eight years there. My father moved a lot with his job. We ended up in Vernon for a couple of years, Didsbury for a couple of years. Finished my high school in Jasper, at Jasper Place Composite. Jasper, is now part of Edmonton, of course. In 1967, did a few labouring jobs here and there. Tried a stint at SAIT, studying aeronautical engineering, but at that time funding for students was very hard to come by, so I left that job, or place of study; had a couple of labouring jobs that, you know, they were short-term jobs, as most labourers' jobs were in those days, and ended up out of work for a very short period of time. My wife's brother-in-law was a shift supervisor at the oils sands' site, at that time Great Canadian Oil Sands, and he suggested I come up for an interview, which I did in June of 1970 and secured employment in early July of 1970 in the extraction operations.





The extraction operations in the oil sands plant was composed of two parts: primary and secondary. The primary part was very traditional mining type, washing of ore and so on, where the oil was actually floated off the sand with hot water and a chemical solution. It was then pump to the secondary extraction, where I worked, where it went through two stages. One was very similar to mining as well, in big screw separators that knocked out the heavier solid materials, and then it went into a secondary system, which was, by and large, nothing more than a giant cream separator that had been modified for oil sands operation. Worked very well, except that the technology—metallurgy more than technology—in those machines was such that the high mineral content in the oil wore parts of them out very quickly.

So, most shifts were very, very busy starting these machines, fixing up parts of them, starting them again, and moving on. So that was a job I had for about almost nine years. At which point, I accepted a staff position in the mining department doing cost estimate analysis, which lasted for a couple of years. I was promoted to a position of mining administration supervisor and a short while after that to area supervisor, mine administration, which was basically just another promotion. From there I moved into human resources as a labour relations' specialist in 1986. Spent a couple of years as a labour relations' specialist. Got promoted to manager of labour relations. Did that for another 11 years almost. Moved on to a labour relations' manager with the Millennium Project, which was the more recent large expansion prior to what's going on up there today, and when that project was finished I moved back into HR proper as a labour relations' consultant. Coincidental with all of my first nine years in extraction, I was also a steward for my part of the plant for about six and a half of those nine years, and I was secretary of the union for three or three and a half years of that time. And I retired officially in September of 2004, but my last day of work was late June of 2004.

AD: Thank you. Now when you went in your first job, did you have any of the requisite skills and did you receive any training on the job? What did you do? Maybe you could talk about it.

GB: Requisite skills at that time were largely you could breathe and walk. If you were able-bodied, you could work, because everybody started as a trainee, and all of the training at the plant was on-the-job-training, largely because it didn't exist anywhere else.

AD: And so who was your boss at the time?

GB: To tell the truth, I don't remember who my first supervisor was. I had a couple of supervisors, because as you moved through positions in the plant, you might have to change shifts because that's where the vacancy was. So I had a number of shift supervisors in my nine years.

AD: And do you want to talk a bit about the shift work?



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GB: The shift at that time was fairly traditional in almost anyplace that ran a 24-hour operation, where the employees rotated between shifts. They were lettered A, B, C, D, and the shifts were generally seven nights on, starting from midnight to eight in the morning, and then a couple of days off, and then seven afternoons, starting from four in the afternoon to midnight, and a single day off, and then seven day shifts, which is eight to four. The best time for shift workers was always either nights or weekends, because all engineering and staff are away and you could actually just run the plant.

AD: Now, were you living in camp at that point?

GB: No, I never lived in camp at all. I was able to find a place to stay. Actually, I stayed with my brother-in-law for about three months, until company housing became available. And then my wife and son and I moved into company housing.

AD: And where was that?

GB: The housing was in the lower townsite of Fort McMurray, the original townsite which was very small. It was only 62 hundred people there when we moved there. A very close-knit community. If you went into the grocery store, you knew everybody. It changed dramatically over my 34 years up there.

AD: When you were there did you think you were only going to stay for a year or two?

GB: Well, oddly, almost everybody that I met when I got on the job, and most people afterwards for several years, their objective was to stay for three years, pocket a few coin, and move on, which was my objective as well, because the money was pretty good and it was a long way from most of my family, so three years seemed like a reasonable sentence.

AD: So, can you tell me, you know, a typical working day on your shift. What did you actually do at the plant?

GB: A typical working day, you'd come in. You'd have to come in a few minutes early so that you could exchange operating information with the people you were relieving. Get changed into work clothes, go to your duty station, do rounds of the equipment, make sure what was running, what wasn't, what needed repairing. Contact with the control room, you know, any time ... if you wanted to shut a machine down that the control room might not have recognized from their instrumentation that was running badly, then you had to phone, let them know you were doing that so that they could balance the flows with the rest of the equipment. And then you'd shut it down,



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take it apart, and clean it or fix it. Sometimes, you had to take these cream separators all the way apart because the solids in the oil you were processing was so thick that it would just plug them up completely. And so you had to lift these bowls out of the cream separator, and they weighed about 18 hundred pounds, with a small crane, and then you'd take it over to a station and disassemble it and clean all these stacks of discs that actually cause the water to separate from the oil and go elsewhere. And clean all the mud and clay and little fibres out of them and put them all back together again. And sometimes you'd do that for a solid eight hours, because that's what happened. On other shifts, it was really nice and smooth. The feed coming in from the mine was just a different grade and you might do nothing but make your rounds and do readings every hour. And nothing else for the shift.

AD: Now how many people were working in that area of the plant?

GB: In my particular unit, there were six of us, I believe.

AD: And so a typical shift would have six?

GB: Yes, in my unit. In the primary extraction, I think there was eight. Elsewhere in the plant ... The plant population, bargaining population at the time that I started, was about, just under 400. So that operated all of the mine, all of the extraction plant, the mining, or the processing units, and the utilities plant, as well as the lab, which had three or four people.

AD: So in terms of your particular operation, it was mostly equipment failure. Now in other parts of the plant, and the extraction, fire was a constant concern.

GB: The refinery in those days was prone to fire. Reason, don't know, but that was an occasional outage for the plant. Now, when the refinery had to shut down because of a fire, we didn't necessarily have to shut down completely. Depending on the amount of oil in the storage tanks or space in the storage tanks, we could run for short periods of time. So, if it was a small fire near a valve or something that they could isolate and reroute easily, you know, we might continue operating for eight hours, 24 hours, just at very reduced rates. A little longer than that, we may do what we called "water recycle," which kept the plant operating, all the units operating in my area, but it was strictly on water so that almost at a moment's notice you could start up again.

AD: Did you have any sense about the work being dangerous?



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GB: No... for the area that I worked in it was ... we had spillages where tanks overflowed and things like that. But it was just messy. It wasn't really dangerous. The danger from my perspective and most of my coworkers was in the refinery, which is typical in a refinery where you have various dangerous gases and the like. The most dangerous things we might be involved in might be during some plant maintenance where we had to do gas testing, because it was explosive in enough concentration, to make sure it was safe for maintenance to work.

AD: And did you, you know, have safety training, drills, whatever?

GB: There was at least monthly safety meetings for each shift. We usually came into work an hour, an hour and a half early for a safety meeting at that time of the month. And we went through that. There was, of course, all of the people that were senior and trained. It was part of their duty to make sure that anybody new coming in wasn't doing anything silly and dangerous. Had training on how to use the gas detection equipment and the like, so that when we were testing either for enough oxygen or explosive atmosphere, that we knew what we were doing.

AD: So did you have ... Was the ticket process in place, you know, when you accomplished different parts of your training?

GB: At that time there was really no training logs on those individual little tasks. There was a log in the area supervisor's office that you had completed the training for your little piece of the gas plant operation. And gas testing might be a piece of that.

AD: What other training did you get?

GB: At that time, basically it was just operation of the plant. Here's what you have to do, here's how all the pieces fit together, flow diagrams, learning how to read piping and instrumentation diagrams for tracing lines, and so on.

AD: And how did you feel about the job?

GB: It was exciting, interesting, and at times exhausting, particularly if you had one of those bad days in operation where you might not sit down for eight hours. But all in all, it was a pretty good job in extraction.

AD: And what about the impact on your family? Do you want to talk ...?



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GB: The family, almost everybody I worked with had the same complaint. When you were on afternoon shift, for example, particularly if you had school kids, there was most of seven days that you didn't see your kids, because they were in school during the day. You'd go to work before they'd get home. They're in bed when you get home. And you're sleeping. You may get up with them in the morning. But you might sleep in, because you have to get up and go to work at four o'clock and you're working 'til midnight.

AD: So that put a burden on the wives, didn't it?

GB: Absolutely. On the whole town, but the town at that time and probably for the first 10 to 15 years had a very pioneering spirit to it. So the people kind of figured out that this was what it was. It was a good gig. And they found ways to cope with it and, you know, by and large families were very peaceful with it. Not a lot of family difficulties, disruptions, break ups, and the like.

AD: In that early period. Did your wife work at the time?

GB: At the time? No. She only started working once the kids were about Grade 2 or thereabouts.

AD: Now, you also ... you mentioned that you became a steward with the union. Do you want to talk about the union and how you were recruited and so on? Had you been a member of a union before going up there?

GB: I was a member of the Labourers Union Local 92 for one of my labour jobs in Edmonton area. So I had some knowledge of a collective agreement. I'd read the collective agreement at our work site in Edmonton here when I was a labourer, and it's one of the first documents somebody on shift showed me. It wasn't particularly in the company's interest to pass out labour agreements, but they passed it on to me. I started reading it, and one of my early friends there was a union steward, and at the time that elections were coming up he decided I would be a good replacement for him and talked me into it. I was in the union executive for a good part of my nine years while I was and extraction operator.

AD: So what did the union duties involve?

GB: The ... Go back to about three years before I joined the company. The plant started up as a non-union operation. Within months of start-up, there was a sense that some common forum for discussing issues would be useful. And employees were looking for some common voice so that they could discuss issues. Because it was a hectic time. You're starting up a plant, a new industry, and there was all kinds of things that, you know, people thought could be done better, or were upset



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about, or a variety of things. So through some means, the employees got together and formed an independent union called Great Canadian Oil Sands Employee Bargaining Association, which was duly certified under the Alberta labour laws at the time. So they became the bargaining agent for that group of employees, which was the group that existed when I joined the company. In about 1971, the independent union was feeling a little pressure from outside unions. Accusations that they were just company stool pigeons and derogatory comments of the like, and they decided they'd take some steps to voice their independence, take a stand that they were not really a part of the company, that they were an entity on to themselves, so they changed their name to McMurray Independent Oil Workers. And you know, developed a crest, developed a new set of bylaws and the like and at that point stated their independence point blank to the company that, you know, we're not what you thought we were.

They, later on in about '75, '76, '75 I think it was, rewrote the bylaws again to allow for a multi-union or a multi-local union. And that was coincidental with the ramping up of the Syncrude hiring. It never achieved multi-local status in that era, but that was part of the intent.

AD: So, in terms of that period that you were involved with the union, was there ... were there grievances, was there any unrest? Do you want to talk about that era?

GB: There was always one section of the plant or another that had a bone to pick. Some of them, you know, were quite legitimate grievances. Some of them were substantial issues. There were in the early days, '72 or thereabouts, some issues with the payroll system, and it was discovered that for about five years the company had been paying people wrong. And it was a mathematical error in the structure of the payroll system that nobody twigged on before and ...

AD: Underpaying or overpaying?

GB: In this case, it was underpaying. And it had to do with a complex calculation that tried to take a monthly salary and pay it biweekly. Because of the shift schedule we were working, every two weeks was a little bit different. You might work as much as, I think, 96 hours and as low as 48 hours, but you were paid on the basis of working 84 every two weeks. So, it was this balancing act of trying to keep the bean counters happy with the books, and paying people from ... trying to keep a steady income flow for employees. And in that process, something was missed, and they actually underpaid some people or in the case of a leave of absence, for example, over deducted people on something they called "pay-time hours." And it was really confusing, and there was only one or two people that actually knew what it was all about.

AD: So when it was discovered, what was done?



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GB: Initially, the payroll supervisor, who I won't name, argued vehemently that it was an absolutely just true system, completely accurate, and it was only after months of dialogue with the company that the union was able to prove that there was in fact a significant calculation error in the design of the program. As a result, there was a ... Because it was too complex to go back and figure out everybody's time for five years or thereabouts, the company and the union agreed to some modest lump sum payments to all employees to try and balance off the books. That was the first of a couple of payroll issues. There was a further one, not too long after that, that had to do with vacation pay, where, again because of the calculation, there was based on gross earnings, and the company was not including some earnings in gross earnings, for ... And it affected people with high overtime. It affected people, actually it affected everybody that took vacation because the vacation pay wasn't all included in gross earnings and it should have been. So we took them to task on that, and I was one of the leads on that. Actually, I was one as well in tracing this pay-time error, and gained a lot of respect from the company for digging this up, dealing with it very factually and without anger. You know, it was just a wrong calculation and it needed to be fixed. So, as a result, we settled on a very simple payment method that allowed pretty much every employee to benefit with some small cash payment for these errors that were three, four, five, six years old.

AD: Now, did anybody mentor you in the union?

GB: My first and probably best experience in the union was a president we had for about half of the time I was in the union as a steward, by the name of Alan Andrews. He was an Englishman. He'd come over, I believe, he was part of the original start-up of the processing unit at Great Canadian Oil Sands, and of course coming from England there's nobody over there that's not union if they're working on tools, so to speak. And he was very instrumental in at least getting me to understand, and others, that sometimes you just had to talk about things long enough until either somebody understood—it might be you—or somebody give in—the company. He took a view that as long as you were talking you were winning, and he also told us repeatedly that "They haven't said no, so they might say yes."

AD: Now, when in that nine and a half year period was there actual labour unrest, going beyond just simple grievances?

GB: There was a brief, I call it brief but it was a little traumatic for me at the time, because I had no idea how long it would last, in '78 there was a labour dispute that lasted for 37 days. I, because I was in the union executive or on the board of stewards at the time, I had a fairly advanced warning that this was a high probability, so I put my affairs in order with the bank and so on so that I could continue to make mortgage payments and so on for this period of time, And so yes ...



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AD: So what was the cause of that first ...?

GB: The issue there, by and large, had to do with a shift schedule in one of the maintenance departments. Unfortunately, one approach taken by the company left the impression that the union could sell to everybody that more schedules were at risk, rather than just this one. And part of it was the wording that was chosen in bargaining. And part of it was the strong differences of opinion between the leadership of the company at that time, particularly the HR group, and the union at that time. That something was going to give, and it was going to be the other party.

AD: Now, I mean, do you want to state who were the respective heads?

GB: The heads of the company at that time, quite honestly, I don't remember.

AD: Who was the union?

GB: The union president at that time was a guy by the name of Don Marchand. Very tenacious, I guess is the best way to describe him. And you know if he thought something was wrong, he would grab a hold of it like a little bulldog, just keep at it. So he did some good things that way—brought people together that may not have been brought together otherwise. But he was, he was tough. And sometimes tough for the wrong reasons.

AD: Now, you made the shift to the staff side around that period, right?

GB: Shortly after the labour dispute, yes.

AD: And so what did that involve then?

GB: That involved a loss of pay in that I was no longer getting built-in shift overtime, because I went from a 42-hour week to a 40-hour week. But the plus was I had a nice stable schedule. Home every evening; home on weekends. And I was in an office environment.

AD: Why do you think you were chosen?

GB: Well, in part, I think it was the work I'd done as a union steward. You know, the two payroll things. I was also asked at the later stages when the company was switching from a bi-weekly, a monthly pay with a bi-weekly pay system to a straight bi-weekly pay system, which mathematically is much more accurate. I was asked by the company to sit on a payroll committee to interview people on site and find out, you know, the whole range of various issues people had with the payroll





system, how the pay stub was structured, information. You know, access to knowing that your pay stub was accurate and all that kind of stuff. I think it was largely that that caused the company to have interest in me as something other than an extraction operator.

AD: So then when you went to the staff side, what was your title and what were your typical duties?

GB: I first started in staff as budget system analyst, which had two components: one, compiling the operating and maintenance budgets for the mine, for the following year, and then monthly, comparing what we actually spent money on to the budget, and trying to figure out what the difference was, and doing up reports for my boss at the time, who was Mike Supple. He was manager of mining at that time.

AD: And how long did you do that?

GB: Uhhh, in or about three years. And at that time, I didn't really change my function, but I was given supervisory responsibilities for a number of clerical staff in the mining. So I had that to do as well as the budget systems work. About two years, maybe less, after that, I was also given responsibility for the maintenance planners and schedulers in the heavy equipment shop. And had my title upgraded to area supervisor. Along that same period of time, I was occasionally asked by the human resources department to do some analysis on parts of the collective agreement.

AD: When did you actually become involved in the whole bargaining process representing the company this time?

GB: Well, going back to my union days, I was in a union bargaining committee in '73, '74, '76, and partially in '78. On the company's side, I was brought in as a back-room worker to do some analysis in 1982 bargaining for the company. And then I was appointed to 1984 bargaining committee for the company as well as 1986, '88, '90, '92 [laughter], '94, '97, and as a consultant for the bargaining committees from every term past '97 up until 2004. And then after I retired, for two bargaining terms after that, which were every three years at that time.

AD: Now, of course, you've talked about the 1978 strike, just over a month's duration. Of course, there is the big strike in 1986 that I'll ask you to talk about. But were there any others leading up to that?

GB: No, there was a very brief strike before I joined the company in 1969 that lasted 10 or 11 days, which was as one of my senior workers there described it to me, "They were just feeling their oats."



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But there was a little bit of something to it, but I mean they really didn't know quite what they were doing. They just wanted to express their discomfort with something that the company wanted to do, and so they were out for 10 days and had their little picket line and settled that. They got something out of it, though not a great deal.

AD: So, we have a major strike eight years after the other month-long strike. Now, what do you think were the causes of that strike?

GB: There were a number of things leading up to that. First off, in or about 1977, the tenacious Don Marchand retired, and a more moderate president took over. And in '70... I'm sorry, that's ... In '85, Don Marchand retired, came back prior to the '86 bargaining and tried to set the record straight for what him and others thought the company took advantage of this moderate president in 1984 bargaining. Along that same time period, the company was experiencing pretty significant financial constraints, because the bottom fell out of the oil price. We'd spent a lot of money on plant improvements, debottlenecking, a variety of things, and there just wasn't return on investment. So, that there was a consulting group brought in, in late '85, which did a bunch of studies on work and processes and determined that we were probably fat by approximately 15 percent. I don't remember the overall numbers, but plant-wide it was in the order of 300 or 320, something in that ballpark.

Of course, some of that effected the union, at least mathematically at the front when it was announced, and so they had that to stand on when it came to bargaining. Just prior to bargaining, the company did lay off, I believe, it was 37 bargaining unit employees as part of this reduction program. And that really annoyed the union, because it was the first time that despite all the difficulties in the almost 20 years leading up to that, plant operations, despite the financial conditions, nobody'd ever been laid off before, so it was a little bit of shock therapy that this could actually happen. In 1985, under Don Marchand, the union filed 357 grievances. Just short of one a day. The highest in plant history. Most of those because the general response to grievance was no, that almost all of them were advanced to arbitration. Some of them did fall off the books, you know, as some clarity came from discussions, but there was a very large significant number, 180 plus at least, at the beginning of the labour dispute, that were still pending arbitration.

AD: Do you think that was a tactic, in terms of Don Marchand?

GB: The grievance process was reviewed as maybe that's the only way we could get heard. And that was expressed by quite a number of employees. And Don being tenacious and somebody has an issue was quite willing to take on those fights.



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AD: Now in terms of interviews that I've done, you know, there have been people who have said, who were there from the early days, that the benevolent and really paternalistic attitude of, you know, Sun Oil personnel policies, and that, you know, that was what was implemented—that vision, those principals. Now ...

GB: That was clearly the case from the time I started probably through the early '80s, mid '80s. There started to be a separation from Sun Oil and, ya, that gradually fell by the wayside, that paternal, father figure company image.

AD: And, you know, now of course we have the benefit of that distance and time. And that we know that it was a global crisis. And that, you know, tumbling oil prices, all of those things, the mini-recession that then became a much bigger recession. But of course the people who were the characters in that particular play at that point, weren't so aware of those larger forces. Or were they?

GB: I think they were. I think they were. But because we'd been an island of prosperity for so long, I think to some, even though, I mean, they had to be aware of what was going on in the outside world, were suspicious that it probably wouldn't rub off on Fort McMurray, and in some cases acted with that as their prime thought. And, you know, it was clearly something that was bigger than the people and personalities in Fort McMurray.

AD: Do you remember who the consulting firm was that did the study that recommended the cuts?

GB: I believe it was Proudfoot. I think they might have had a longer name, but Proudfoot is the piece of it that I remember. In fact, they recommended eliminating my job.

AD: So you [laughter] ...

GB: While I was on the bargaining committee for the company, my job got eliminated, and I was assigned as shift supervisor in extraction when the strike or the labour dispute was over.

AD: Okay, so you experienced this personally. So, basically, then we've got the union and the company at loggerheads.

GB: Had been for 12, 18 months.

AD: Okay, so then, describe the strike. How it unfolded and how it escalated, and eventually the outcome.

GB: A couple of things that ... the union came to the table in '78 bargaining, I'm sorry, '86 bargaining, with a view of setting things right in their mind. They had many, many issues on their



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bargaining agenda, in the hundreds, which was not terribly unusual except that it was a little bigger than some in the past. The personalities on the bargaining committee were handpicked by Don Marchand, so they were of like mind, so they were there to set things straight. The company, on the other hand, was pretty certain that for starters that they couldn't do much, give much because of the economic conditions, and it was not only hold the line but try and either get rid of or reduce some of the very favourable pay practices that the union had built up over 18 years, almost 20 years. So, there was all these steady, steady disagreements. The other thing that was different from previous rounds of bargaining is the company used to agree to take little sections of the agreement, normally three articles, bargain those to a temporary settlement and then set them aside and move on to the others, and in '86 bargaining we decided it is a collective agreement, we'll bargain it lock, stock, and barrel, so that became a big bone of contention with the union. Can't do it that way; it's too big, but we stuck with it.

AD: So then, you know, you know, one remembers if one is interested in labour history, you know, the Pocklington meat packers' strike. Now, of course, this was going on at Suncor and, of course, there was violence on the picket lines in Edmonton. Do you want to talk about, you know, the picket lines, injunctions, all of those things that happened? How long did the strike last?

GB: The strike lasted for just under six months. Pretty close to five and a half, from May 1st 'til I believe the return to work date was October 17th or on or about that point, so it was substantial for a population that in some cases were living pay cheque to pay cheque. It is fairly common anywhere there is a labour dispute, the union and the company go through this dance of, you know, what's going to be tolerated on the picket line. And the union will invariably provide enough evidence with either bodies or some hothead throwing a rock or the like to give the company sufficient evidence to apply to the Labour Relations Board to cease and desist, curtail the number of pickets, so that work can proceed. I mean, it is a place of employment for hundreds of other people and they're entitled to get to their jobs and earn a living. So that's traditional, that's common. The violence in McMurray in '86, I don't think it was largely different than other places.

AD: But there was rock throwing.

GB: There was rock throwing, bus windshields were broken, you know, car windshields were shattered, people felt intimidated even if they weren't outright threatened. So there was a lot of discomfort for anybody that had to get into the plant during those first few days of the labour dispute.

AD: Now at one point, the RCMP came in en masse. Do you want to talk about that?



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GB: That was as much a surprise to me as anybody else. I was living in camp at the time, and it was coincidental with the provincial election. I only have rumours of how they got there, but I understood that this large contingent was on their way to Expo '86, and this proved to be a useful training grounds for some of their crown control exercises.

AD: Okay [laughter].

GB: I don't know if that's true or not, but that's the rumour that was about. Coincidental with election day, so all of the employees that were locked in the camp, running the plant had to get out to vote. So buses were organized to bring people out to vote, which the union fussed a little bit about. I mean, they slowed things down to let the buses out, but it never became a huge issue until the buses returned, after the people had voted. Personal opinion, I think it was a major faux pas for the union to disrespect election day, but that's just personal opinion. As a result of it, some 120 strikers were locked with plastic handcuffs and taken in and booked in court. No charges were ever processed, but you know everybody made the trip into town and got fingerprinted and were booked, but nothing came of it other than that. Shortly after that, the Labour Board and the courts reduced the pickets to some number, I think it was six or eight, it might have been ten, but they were restricted from actually standing on the roadway. They had to express their concerns from the sides of the road and not restrict traffic in any way.

AD: Now, I'd like you to talk a bit about the conflict, its impact on the lives of people, and I'm thinking, well, of unionized labour, but of course we'll talk about the staff. I'll ask you some questions about the staff side as well. You know, some relatives were on different sides; there were tensions that were expressed through letters to the editor of the Fort McMurray newspaper. Do you want to talk a bit about that and the personalities of ...?

GB: I didn't get very close to a lot of that activity, in part because in the early days inside the plant operating and in the later days my total focus was bargaining and trying to figure out where we were going along the way to eventually resolve these things. But, I mean, I had friends that were in the bargaining unit that I conversed with on occasion outside because we'd been friends for life, or life in McMurray. And even though I had kids in school, my kids never received any comments about my involvement, in part, maybe, because I took a very low profile and never connected work with family. But there were others that ... in some cases, the more senior employees in the company, whose families were jeered and so on, walking down the street, in the grocery store. Bargaining unit people, some of them—a great many of them actually—left town because they either had to get temporary work to make it viable to return to McMurray or they just left. There were members,



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employees who were in the bargaining unit whose wife or husband was on staff and so one was going to work and one wasn't. You know, one was picketing and waving to the other going by on the bus. So it was a tough time for a lot of people.

AD: Now, do you want to talk about, you know, how the plant was run during the strike, because, you know, strikers made some accusations about, you know, senior employees being brought in from the east? Do you want to talk about how the plant, how the management ran the plant during the strike?

GB: Suncor, as a Canadian company, had facilities in Ontario, and some small facilities elsewhere, and yes, we did bring in operators, particularly refinery, because that's a fairly specialized section of the plant operation. We brought in some contractors to help out with some of the dirt moving in the mine. We redeployed almost all the staff people to any kind of work that was close to something that they were physically able to do. We brought in engineering staff and technical people from other parts of the Suncor operation in order to run the plant, because bills still had to be paid and that's not un-normal for a company, for a company to try and continue an operation. I know the union would call almost anybody that works during a strike a scab, but there were no actual new employees brought in for purposes of operating the plant. We would hire contractors where contractors had a specialty, either in maintenance, which most of our maintenance was done by contractors anyway, or dirt moving, which, you know, we required either dirt equipment or operating skills for that that a lot of the office staff—it was just too steep a learning curve to put in there.

AD: So, briefly, you went back to some of your old duties, am I right?

GB: I did. I was back in extraction and operating the plant, cleaning Westfalia separators again and running the board on occasion, and ya.

AD: And so what were the learnings as a result of these non-traditional workers working in this technical area?

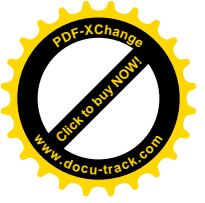
GB: The initial stint, two weeks or thereabouts, a number of the staff employees were familiar with this from 1978, because they'd ...

AD: They'd moved up the ranks.

GB: Well, they'd moved up the ranks or they'd, they were staff in '78 and, you know, out walking the conveyor belts in the mine for a few weeks and so this was, you know, this was okay for a ... it's a nice change of pace for a couple of weeks, because a lot of folks didn't really anticipate that it



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would drag on for as long as it did. So, it was, it was okay. But as it progressed, the production didn't lag. In fact, we set some records during the labour dispute. We found a number of work-flow processes that could be streamlined and made note of all of those for post-labour dispute so we could keep those learnings. The lines of communication with employees and, particularly, between groups like technical services engineering group and the operating groups. Learned a whole lot there about shortened communication systems.

AD: So then how was the strike resolved?

GB: The strike, and we chose to simply call it a labour dispute because, you know, nobody wanted to get into a pissing contest, you know, over was it a lockout or was it a strike, so labour dispute covers all the bases.

When the notices were exchanged at the bargaining table at the beginning of May, the union had signed an affiliation agreement. At that time, it was McMurray Independent Oil Workers, had signed an official affiliation agreement with Energy Chemical Workers Union, which for a bit of history is the offshoot of Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, formerly international. Their Canadian arm became Energy Chemical Workers Union. And that agreement provided some technical expertise but no access to the union ECW strike fund. So, after the dispute started, there was no bargaining for about 30 days, which again is not terribly unusual. And when we returned to the bargaining table, the company was reduced to Ron Wood, who was the spokesman, Vaughn Hibbits, who was the manager of human resources, and myself, who at that time was an extraction shift supervisor that had never seen that job in the new assignment. All of the regular human resources folks that were on the bargaining committee were dropped from the committee, and there was myself, and Ron Wood, and Vaughn Hibbits that carried on for the company. The union brought in two individuals from Energy Chemical Workers Union, Buck Philp, who was a national troubleshooter, which was how they like to call him, and—oh, the name escapes me at the moment—and they essentially spoke on behalf of the local union for the balance of bargaining. And we spent a month off and on just going over what was left on the table and trying to get clarity on the issues. And then talks were suspended for a period of time.

ECW, I think, recognized that a basis for settlement couldn't be arrived at at the table because of personalities on both sides. So, initiated some side bar discussions to try and see if there was some ground that we could settle on. So, by and large, that involved Ron Wood and Buck Philp. Somewhere, I'm not sure where they were. I got a phone call once in a while for some clarity on something in the agreement, because neither one of them worked on the agreement, and eventually along about September we found enough ground to have full bargaining sessions again, clarified a



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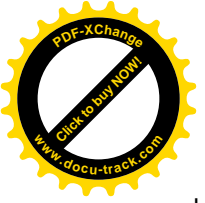
few more issues, and that took off and on the best part of another month. Best part of another month doesn't mean continuous meetings. There was off and on research and debating and most of the debating with your own committee on what was in the realm of the possible. And, long about early October, it was decided by the parties in these side bars and, you know, their senior people that they reported to that there was enough there to try and actually take a run at finding a solution to the entire dispute. And that was accomplished early in October. Had to, you know, put some finishing touches on a few things and people were brought back to work, as I said, on or about October 17th. Part of the significant change in that was a recognition by both parties that the way we did business in the past simply wasn't viable for either party in the future and there was a significant effort put into relationship change post-labour dispute.

AD: Can, can you give me a few of the key building blocks of that agreement that ended the labour dispute?

GB: There were a number of things. Key for the union was the commitment that the bargain was the bargain. And the history that the company collected on their senior leadership, Reg Baskin and Buck Philp, in particular, was that their word was good. So, if they signed an agreement and it said X and some employee come to them and wanted Y, then that employee was going to be told no. It was that simple. So we took that as gospel. They, the union, for their part, accepted that the company was going to change, and part of that demonstrated change was a number of the human resource professionals were moved out of the labour relations department. And that's when I got my job offer to go into labour relations, because they'd learned through bargaining that, one, I'd listened. I was able to demonstrate that I understood the code. One person on our bargaining committee would sit there and I'd make copious notes on the things that Buck Philp was saying on the various sections of the dispute and I had to interpret for this other fella. And we had many debates in his office. "No, Buck didn't say that."

"No, he didn't say that, but this is what the message he was ..." So they understood that I was able to understand the code as it were. And I had a history in the union for fighting for what was right as well, so there was some respect there. The company and the union jointly agreed to some training of stewards and supervisors, because the belief was that these folks were both off and on their own, beating on each other, without either understanding or grounds. So, one of the undertakings coming out of the labour dispute was training supervisors, in particular, on the new deal, as it was, prior to return to work, which we accomplished with training sessions that ran at all hours of the day and night so that we could get all of the staff in their now operating and maintenance functions prior to when they went back to their old jobs. And, the union for their part used the same training documents, by and large, with their stewards. You know, here's the deal and here's how we're going





to behave and we're not going to fight over stuff that is settled. And you know, if we happen to come across an issue that we simply can't agree on, we'll agree to disagree, but that's not going to get in the way of whatever we're discussing next, which was a fairly significant point, given our history.

AD: Now, what did the company look like, you know, for the beginning of the rebuilding, as it were?

GB: Ah ...

AD: Staffing, whatever.

GB: The bargaining committee, we were short, I think we lost about 220 people that actually quit during the labour dispute. And a handful that just didn't show up when we returned to work, but not many. On the staff side, we had extra people because of this study from late '85 that said we had approximately 15 percent too many. So, during the fall of '86, some of the staff folk were packaged out, as it were, given severance and moved on. So, it was a shrinking company coming out of the labour dispute. You know, there was a lot of plant learnings during the dispute that had to be transferred to the bargaining unit, because they were the rightful operators of the plant. So there was a bit of work to do there for some of our technical people, and supervisory staff. So it was quite a changed company in that the "them" and "us" terminology and mindset was changing and had to change. Some people not as willing to change as others [laughter]. And, you know, you had to deal with those.

AD: Would it be fair to say that in terms of the actual cuts to the bargaining unit workers, the majority of them were addressed by people choosing not to come back and finding other work?

GB: In the original estimate in the job reduction program, that's not only true, but the 37 that were actually laid off very shortly before the labour dispute as part of the return to work agreement were rehired.

AD: Okay. Now, we get the labour dispute out of the way, but you know things tend to happen in multiples [laughter]. And so do you want to talk about the big fire?

GB: Things were going along smoothly with this new relationship. We were solving problems. We were doing things without fighting. By contrast, the first year under the new agreement had something like 17 grievances versus 357. There was only one arbitration case, and that was a discharge case, which I mean that's reasonable. So things were going along quite smoothly. We were, you know, rebuilding the plant and the people, training as well as hiring. And Thanksgiving weekend



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of '87 we had a major fire in our extraction plant, which was a bit of a shock to people because it's iron, steel, and a lot of built up dirt and tar sand, and not really conceivable that that would be a fire. If there was going to be a fire, it would be in the processing unit.

But what had happened was the conveyor belts feeding the plant, in order to keep the sticky oil sand from building up on them and breaking them, there was a light diesel fuel that was sprayed on the belts to keep them a little bit slick so that the tar sand, once it got to extraction, would fall off the belts instead of some of it making a return journey. And somehow this diesel fuel that had accumulated under the belt caught fire and grew very rapidly sufficient that the primary extraction plant was significantly damaged. Enough to keep us out of operation and now going into it we had no idea how long but, in hindsight, it was four or five months that we were completely out of operation. So you know, this was a major acid test for the new relationship.

One of the first things that occurred was a meeting with the union and the labour relations folks, and a commitment that we would do everything reasonable possible to ensure full employment. And this was going on, in part, while the fire was still being fought. As we got clarity on the extent of the damage, we started to look at "Well, what do we have to do to employ, you know, several hundred people that have no jobs to do because the extraction plant is inoperable." The refinery because we were going into winter, you pretty much have to keep it warm, so the upgrading people had their part of the plant running units as required to keep the place warm and not let it freeze up. The utilities plant had to run because they had to produce the electricity and the steam and air for other purposes. But, essentially, everybody else was, to be a little blunt, redundant.

It took a couple of weeks to determine the significance of the damage. And what the surplus workforce was going to be for however long it took to rebuild. And then we weren't clear on that for quite a while as well. But one of the steps that was taken was to set up a redeployment program for all of the people whose jobs were affected by this. It was staffed by three union stewards, a couple of supervisors - there was a representative from HR; there was a representative from our prime contractor. And they staffed one of the training rooms 24 hours a day, and became a clearinghouse for, firstly, they developed an inventory for all of the skills of people who didn't have jobs for the moment. And we found some interesting skills in there. You know, people were doing X and you know they could do Y and Z as well and nobody knew about it. So they developed this list of skills. And then they started collecting from maintenance, from contractors, you know, here's all the work that we need doing that's associated with the rebuild job. And the redeployment centre, it could have been a union steward; it could have been a supervisor—would get a hold of, you know, "You need 12 people for this," and they would go through their list and find twelve people and get in touch with them and say, "Okay, you're assigned here for the next week or 10 days," or whatever.



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And some people did multiple jobs during that long rebuild. But not a single person was laid off. As a contingency, people were encouraged to use up what was left of their '87 vacation, because that was a way that takes them off the books, so to speak. They were encouraged to, in the early '88 period, use up their '88 vacation. People were offered unpaid leaves-of-absence, if they wanted, you know, 30 days off to go and do something they otherwise couldn't do. So there's all kinds of different ways to try and make use of all of these people in a productive way.

AD: So, I mean, it seems ironic to say that, or to even consider that, the strike, in essence, no the labour dispute, because, of course, there's a lockout as well as the strike component really resulted in an attitudinal change that benefited the company in the next era?

GB: Oh, absolutely, and benefited the union as well, because their admin costs dropped like a stone. Where they were spending hours and hours and thousands of dollars and the like for grievance processing, now they were spending very little on that. They were spending a little more on admin time, doing research, working on joint problem solving, you know, health and safety committees, and a number of other things. Change of focus from fighting hundreds of grievances, most of which would never go anywhere.

AD: So that attitudinal shift happened. How long did it take to rebuild the parts of the plant that were destroyed, and how long to get production up to speed again?

GB: Can I take a couple of minutes?

AD: Yes, absolutely. Let's break.

[Break in recording.]

GB: Partial production in February.

AD: Does the noise in the background of the coffee maker affect [the recording]?

Background voice [videographer].

AD: Ya, so?

GB: I thought I'd mention it because I'd come across it the other day.

AD: Okay, so you were giving me an idea ...

Background voice.



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GB: Oh, okay. I didn't see it [laughter].

AD: So you were giving me an idea of, you know, what the company looked like after this in terms of you've talked about the collaboration between the union and management, but in terms of production and other elements.

GB: The learnings that we got in the labour dispute in the operation of the plant were most useful, and we continued all of those. We continued to build the plant, improve things. More money was committed in '87 to do another debottlenecking, which would increase production by some margin as well, so things were looking very positive in all aspects after the labour dispute.

AD: Now do you want to talk about the evolution of the union?

GB: The union, interesting, I talked about some of this that occurred just before I was hired on. The official name changed to declare their independence, as McMurray Independent Oil Workers. Later on, in or about the timing of Syncrude startup, which I believe was '77, '78, just a little prior to that, the union changed their constitution entirely. I was one of three members of the constitutional committee, to allow for a multi-local union. So that, and from that point on, McMurray Independent Oil Workers became McMurray Independent Oil Workers, Local 1, in anticipation that there may be others. There weren't others until much later in their time, when they organized some very small groups, and that was actually done after their affiliation with Chemical Workers Union.

So they picked up some janitorial companies in McMurray; another small oil-based company of some sort. I don't even remember the name of it, in McMurray area. But nothing substantial. I talked about the affiliation with Energy Chemical workers at the beginning of the labour dispute. Once the labour dispute was behind us, Energy Chemical Workers and MOW actually signed a merger agreement, but they didn't give up their name entirely, so it became one of the longest names in the unionized group. It was McMurray Independent Oil Workers, Local 707, Energy Chemical Workers Union. And that persisted up until just after '92 bargaining, when that name still existed, when there was another change in the union where energy chemical workers joined with the Canadian paperworkers to become the Canadian Energy and Paperworkers Union. And the local up there adopted that name as CEP 707 in or about '93.

AD: Now, how did your job evolve after this?

GB: After the labour dispute?

AD: Yes.



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GB: Well, I became full time in labour relations at the end of the dispute. Although from late in, well maybe the middle of, '85, I never actually did my job because I was full time to the bargaining committee doing bargaining prep and the like, leading up to the bargaining and then through the labour dispute. So, at the end of the labour dispute, I was offered the job of labour relations' specialist. I was in a group of four people, plus a manager. Two of us did labour relations, each for a part of the plant, and two of us did employee services for part of the plant. Theoretically, employee services deals with all the staff issues and labour with the bargaining issues. And we continued solving problems working with the union, you know, all through this period of late '86, '87, leading up to '88 bargaining, I was asked by our labour relations' manager at that time to be the other member of the company's bargaining committee. Smallest bargaining committee the company ever had, from previous numbers of seven to nine down to under two.

AD: And who was the other member besides yourself?

GB: The other member was a guy by the name of Terry MacDonald. A very nice guy—I don't remember his background—but really good to work with and a good boss. And post-bargaining ... The other significant change that occurred with '88 bargaining was that all other bargainings had taken place in one of the hotels in McMurray. The company would rent a room, probably two rooms, because there was a caucus room and a back room for admin staff. And the union would rent a room for their caucus room, and we would share the cost of a conference room for the actual bargaining sessions. In '88, neither party found a desire or need to do that and we simply met in the union office on those occasions when we were in formal bargaining and had our discussions there. Post that round of bargaining, my boss Terry was promoted to director of human resources, leaving the position of manager, labour relations, employee services, open, and that was offered to me. There was a contest for it that I never applied for, but the job was offered to me, and I never did ask about the details of that one. I know one of my co-workers had applied for it, and I kept completely mum about the issue. I wasn't really looking for it, but when it was offered to me it was offered in such a way that it sounded quite appealing.

AD: And so is that the position then that you had until your retirement, or did you ...?

GB: No, that's the position I had until I moved into the next major phase of the plant expansion, which was called the Millennium Project. The Millennium Project essentially doubled the refinery capacity. There was some peripheral stuff expanding the capacity of the mine, but essentially it was the expansion of the upgrader and the extraction plants. We actually built a second extraction plant



as part of that process. So at that point I was assigned ... because part of my job as manager of labour relations was to interface with all of the other contractors on site. Not Suncor employees, but employees of contractors, with the contractor management, and in the case of unionized contractors, the unions that represented those ...

AD: Could you give me an example of some of those contractors and the unions?

GB: Our maintenance contractor for example at the time was Delta Catalytic. And Delta had pipefitters, welders, labourers, insulators, the whole range of trades that might be necessary for maintenance. And they were all represented by their individual labour unions, all part of the Alberta Building Trades Council. So had to interface with all of those folks from time to time as manager labour relations. Became quite familiar with many of them, so for good reasons and some for not so good reasons [laughter]. But we came to understand each other and what my role was representing Suncor. I was not representing their employers in any way, shape, or form. I was, anytime I spoke to them, it was strictly on Suncor's interest as owner of the site.

AD: And, you know, how many workers from these contractors were involved on the site, just to get a sense of the totality?

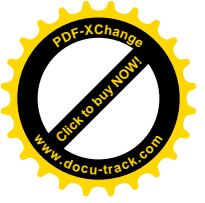
GB: The normal, you know, day to day operation, there might be 300, 350, or in that ball park. It varied depending on maintenance schedule. Turnarounds, there might be 18 hundred. During various construction phases, you'd have both maintenance working and construction working, and there could be a steady state of a thousand, 12 hundred. Major construction like Millennium, there was upwards of 3,000.

AD: Because, I mean, in terms of the Fort McMurray itself, it still has a sense of grievance that it, in terms of other municipalities in the province, it hasn't had the help or benefits that other municipalities have had. And even in terms of the population. What is the population? Does it include all of the camps?

GB: That's always the dispute. Is, you know, what is the population in the census? And it will tell you how many people reside in the municipality of Wood Buffalo. What it doesn't give you is the number of people who are involved in the economic activity for Wood Buffalo, which is a large ... You know, people like to use the transient population, which is a bit of a misnomer, because some of those people have been in the McMurray area working on construction in one form or another, one plant or another, for many, many years. That's their job. So in some cases, transient is a bit of a misnomer.



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AD: But you, in terms of dealing with all the different trades and companies, you'd have a sense of that. Do you want to talk about that?

GB: The interface with the trades?

AD: Yup.

GB: On a day-to-day basis, it was largely nominal. I would only get involved with them if there was an issue with some of their members. For example, if they were holding or threatening to hold up a piece of work on the Suncor site, or if one of their members would have been apprehended taking material out of the plant site without permission. But, day to day, not a great deal of involvement with them. I used to attend, in my job as manager labour relations, the annual building trades convention, or not convention, conference, which was usually a two, two and a half day conference somewhere in Alberta—Jasper, Canmore—where they'd get together with not only the business agents for the various unions, some of the job stewards, and some of the rank-and-file members as well. Part of the conference would be open forum with owners and employers. So Suncor, Syncrude was an owner, Delta Catalytic and others of the like were employers. And it would be a get together, share views, see what the big issues were in front of all the parties, and then there'd be a section of the conference that was closed door for the unions to discuss policy and the like. So those were at least an annual rubbing shoulders with them, getting to know them, and them getting to know us and where we stood on things.

AD: I'm going to go back to the evolution of the plant because, of course, you know, the move to truck and shovel had implications for human resources.

GB: It did.

AD: So do you want to talk about that and your take on it, and its implications, you know?

GB: The fortunate timing of that was that it was several years into the new relationship post '86. Had it occurred anytime prior to that it, in or of itself, would have, I think, created a significant labour dispute. Because the result of the move to truck and shovel was shutting down all of our known methods of mining. And because our collective agreement was built on, you know, one group, the bucket wheel had their own separate little terms and conditions within the body of the agreement. The support staff that did all the heavy equipment work had another separate section of the agreement. They had separate seniority lists from one another. And the overburden, which took off all the material before these folks got to it, had another one. And the nature of truck and shovel is it's all heavy equipment work. You scrape off the dirt, you dig up the tar sand, move it to the



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extraction plant. So bucket wheel became redundant, but we had as a dilemma - three, four seniority lists that somehow we had to merge in order to make this a viable operation.

The nature of the agreement at that time was such that had we simply, and there was, there was some anticipated job losses out of this, as well on both the staff and bargaining unit side. Had we simply made the cut with eliminating the bucket wheels, we would have, as a result, laid off employees with in excess of 20 years service. And there would have been employees in these other mining groups—separate seniorities—with a couple of years seniority still working. We knew going into this, before any discussions with the union, the entire scope of that effect, and I'd processed all the ramifications of that as if we simply laid off the bucket wheel group.

I, at the same time, created a "what if" list, if we simply treated all of the mine folks as one group. And once we had some idea of what those things looked like, we opened dialogue with the union, put all the cards on the table. You know, here's what we're doing, why we're doing it. You know, the bucket wheels were hard to maintain, and because they were links in a chain your uptime was only as good as the chain itself. If any link was broken, then the chain was down, so the uptime was really a function of, you know, 80 percent of that, 80 percent of that, 80 percent of that, which left you with about 60 percent uptime, which was quite ineffective considering the investment.

Truck and shovel, because you have a whole bunch of individual links operating, you know, if one link is out, you just add another link in because you've got spares. Bucket wheels' repair belts, you can move them that easily. Plus they were getting old. The technology of trucks and shovels had changed dramatically, 'cause we had some big trucks moving overburden in supplementary mining, and we had no end of difficulty with these big electric trucks. The tar sand is just so much different than hard-rock mining. The road-base rolling resistance, the electric motors just weren't built to handle that, despite multiple redesigns. So we'd give all of that background to the union and said, you know, "We've got a dilemma. If we simply follow the agreement, this is what it looks like. If we do something different, it could look like this. Let's talk about how we get through this." And we were able to work through all those issues quite peacefully, and that side of the change went very well.

AD: So what was the outcome in terms of, say, how many people were actually, received termination notices? How many of them went into other parts of the plant and were incorporated in that way?

GB: The programs that were put in place and these were discussed with the union prior to making them available in the bargaining unit because we knew there was something in the order of a hundred extra positions. What it actually turned out ... I mean going in it's X and by the time you work



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through all the issues and actually staff it, it's Y, so ... But it started our fairly significant for that piece of the operation. And so we offered as part of this to lighten the burden, voluntary severance and enhanced early retirement, because at that point we had employees who had 20-, 25-years service. They were, you know, late 30s, early 40s when they started working, and you know a retirement with a little boost could be very attractive. And there were no actual layoffs. Everything was accomplished either by growth in need. You know, we needed more than we thought going in. Or voluntary programs took care of it in the bargaining unit. On the staff side, there were some actual severances ...

AD: Now the other, you know, because you're labour specialist, talking to people who were around in the early days. You know the first 300, and how they had to train them up. And you know, a lot of them were farm boys who, you know, who knew, you know, how to fix their tractors, whatever, so that the level of education was not as high. Would that be fair?

GB: True. That's true.

AD: But of course ...

GB: That was also a plus.

AD: Do you want to talk about that?

GB: Particularly in mining and extraction. You talked about the farm boys. They knew how to fix stuff. They knew how to get from A to B over a hurdle. The same in the extraction plant. That ingenuity that "we can do it" was invaluable. And it didn't need education. It has that hands-on skill, that mechanical aptitude, that I can't afford to get somebody else to do it, so I'll do it myself that was extremely valuable in the early days of the plant.

AD: But then things changed. I mean, all the new specialties at NAIT and SAIT, and you know, the University of Alberta, where someone who was hired in the first five years would not 20 years later, wouldn't be able to do the job that he did, because of changes in the workforce and expectations with respect to educational qualifications.

GB: We changed some hiring practices only because the training was more widespread and you could actually get candidates.

AD: Okay.



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GB: And you know, there's a whole evolution of step changes from about '72 onwards. When the plant started up, for example, there was no such thing as an instrumentation tech. It was someone who had learned some stuff and who was able to fix the analog instrumentation and replace it, patch it, put it back together, whatever. The instrumentation of the '80s when we started upgrading control rooms was vastly different, but there were training programs in place that come along with the technology or led the technology, I'm not sure which, that made it not on possible but necessary in some cases to hire those skills.

AD: Now what about the issue of foreign workers?

GB: Foreign workers never really became an issue other than on construction. And in my time at Suncor, it was an issue with some technical people. Largely trying to help clear hurdles for some special people for contractors' staff, because they needed this particular skill and it just wasn't readily available. We had to assist in getting that. But foreign workers generally are not an issue for Suncor. We used to do a lot of foreign recruiting, but that's very different than foreign workers.

AD: Do you want to talk about the foreign recruiting?

GB: Not really, because I'm not a foreign recruiter.

AD: Okay. You only did the ...

GB: Recruiting was, was ... I just didn't like it. It was onerous as hell, whereas labour relations was interesting and fun.

AD: Okay. So that was your choice. Now, of course, there are various ways of looking at oil sands development from the scientific and technological and then, of course, to get into, you know, corporations and corporate history and so on. And then there's the cult of the CEO and, you know, what that means for companies. And, of course, Frank sorry, wrong, ignore that ...

GB: Wrong company.

AD: Ya, wrong company. Now, in terms of the eras of change, there, of course, there is the Dee Parkinson Marcoux era of change which, of course, coincided with the truck and shovel. Do you want to talk about that, because, I mean, that was a restructuring. You've talked about elements of that without mentioning her name.

GB: That was the most significant change in Suncor's history up to that point in time. You know, we'd built the plant and, you know, survived the ups and downs with this bucket wheel technology





which, you know, everybody was familiar with and, you know, didn't want to give it up and it was costly and Dee was, by and large, the spearhead to try and demonstrate that there were other ways, that truck and shovel could work as a mining technology, because it works elsewhere. Had to overcome the issues of "has the truck and shovel technology caught up to the rigors of the tar sand?" And everybody was reasonably comfortable to the "yes" answer to that question, and we proceeded with the very significant shift in the concept and ideas on how to get that stuff out of the ground.

AD: Now, of course, she was brought in as a change agent, as an efficiency expert, all of those things. And so my sense is that she did ruffle some feathers.

GB: She ruffled some feathers. I think in part, because I experienced a little bit of this myself, she would ask questions and she expected answers. And, you know, you couldn't slough it off that we've always done it that way. That wasn't good enough. Why should we continue doing it that way? What makes you think that that's the only way to do it?

AD: And then, of course, the whole opportunity. And again this is the vagaries of government policy, that you create PetroCan, you know, this huge Crown corporation, and then you know it gets sent back into the private sector. Do you want to talk about that?

GB: It never really crossed my desk as an issue or concern. You know, my focus was on the labour side, the labour laws. You know, what was happening with corporate Canada. It wasn't a particular interest unless in and of itself it had a very significant economic impact that I might have to deal with.

AD: Okay. Now, I want to talk about you residing in Fort McMurray and that whole, you know, all of that ... what that was like. But before I shift to that, is there anything else in terms of your working life that you, that, you know, I haven't asked the right question to elicit that response. Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

GB: Well, interestingly, despite ...

Outside voice [videographer referring to cartridge]: Can we just pause it there for a sec? 'Cause everything's at almost zero right now.

GB: Okay.



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AD: Drink, quickly. Because I'm worried about swallowing, because this mike is right there [recording stopped].

Outside voice: We're rolling.

AD: So my question was, Is there anything that you, you know, in terms of your work life that I haven't asked you the right question to elicit that? Is there anything else you want to talk about?

GB: Well, I had a fairly-high profile work wise. In the community, I was just Joe. Never, never combined the two, my family and work. But in the work side I had a fairly high profile, in particular with the building trades, because there were a number of their members, employees of a contractor, who misbehaved in a fashion that we no longer wanted them on site. So, part of my role was to inform the union that they shouldn't send that person to our site anymore because they weren't welcome. And, I mean, over the years, there got to be quite a number of these. Despite all of that, never got a single threat ever from anybody from the building trades, anybody from Suncor employees bargaining unit group, at all. You know, and I had some tough nuts to work with.

The only time that there was a real profile for one of my activities was during the Suncor annual general meeting, which was held in Fort McMurray, the only one time, in about '99. I think it was '99, but I'm not sure. It might have been 2000. This one individual that I had barred from site, 'course the public knew the annual general meeting was there. The board of directors were all coming to site for a tour and a meeting and to view the new Millennium Project and stuff, and this individual went through the effort of painting several sheets of plywood with his concerns about being barred from site. And good advertising for me, as I found out later, some of the human resources folks were really nervous about this, because Rick George is going to see this, the board is going to see this, they're going to go, you know, ape on this, and what are you going to do about it. He's on public property. What do you want me to do about it? But one of the signs was simply, "Gene, why can't I bring home the Bacon?" [Laughter.] About his lost job opportunities from his misbehaviour. We had a reception later that evening with the board of directors and senior executives from Calgary and I happened to meet Rick George there and he shook my hand and thanked me for keeping the riffraff out [laughter].

AD: Well, you know, in terms of ... a company needs good labour relations.

GB: It's critical.

AD: And that they learned that if they have adversarial individuals you don't get good labour relations.



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GB: It's expensive.

AD: Ya. So that's an acknowledgement, you know, of your tenure in that area.

GB: It's also important at least from my perspective, and I know from some companies, Suncor today and other companies, but a single voice on labour relations for a corporation is really important, because it prevents the, you know, four different versions of the truth getting out and the union seizing on one of those they like and it just takes way too much work to undo it.

AD: Is there anything else?

GB: Uh, it was a blast. My labour relations time, you know, other than the odd day, and every job has a bad day, thoroughly enjoyed all of it. The meetings with the building trades when I was on the Millennium Project, I met them more frequently there, because there was almost daily interchange with them, because I was separated from the mainstream Suncor work. I was on a construction site. I shared an office with the contractor/labour relations group. Met with them daily. The union representatives were stopping in my office at least daily, the one or the other of the 17 or 18 that had trades on site. So I got to know a lot of them very well, and I was able to speak to the groups of them occasionally at their annual conferences. And in fact, I got a very nice retirement gift from the building trades when I retired.

AD: So how many people were working on the Millennium Project?

GB: Upwards of 3,000. I think the peak was just under five, but that didn't last very long.

AD: And they were living in camps, were they?

GB: They were living in camps for the most part. A lot of the supervisors/foremen, which were still in the union for that purpose, because we'd run out of camp space, were living in town in whatever accommodations they could find. Excuse me. And they got paid a subsistence for room and board as opposed to living in camp at company cost. A lot of senior management and anything from superintendent and up and all the engineering clerical staff and the like for the contractors, were living in town some place. I mean, any spare house, any spare room was used.

AD: I mean, you know the image of the Fort McMurray or I mean its conventional oil worker, the driller, riggers, etc., is that they have more money than sense and the whole drinking and drugs. I mean, do you want to comment at all on that?



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GB: That was an attribute attributed to construction folks as well. The highway from the plant site down to Edmonton on a Friday night, which was the traditional end of the work week, was as fast as you could go using every lane on the highway in your direction. There's a big hill just south of the plant, called Super Test that was expanded, in part, to allow heavy construction loads to go up and down, that was wide enough for six lanes, although it only had four. And it was known on occasion that there would be six lanes southbound. Any of the plant employees who were going out of town would check the construction schedule first and try and get off work an hour or two early so that they could try and beat these folks to Edmonton. Now, they weren't all that way, but there were enough of them that they got the reputation.

AD: Do you think that's typical of a boom town, because now I want to move into what it was like for you and your wife and your children, you know, being in Fort McMurray, which ...

GB: I think it's typical of any location where there are a large number of workers who don't live there. And on their days off, don't want to stay there. And while they're there they're making big bucks. The actual residents of that locale, wherever they are, notice and feel it.

AD: So there really is a them and us. I mean, when you went up did you experience any negatively? I wouldn't even go so far as to say discrimination from, you know, the people that had been there for a very long time, homesteading, you know.

GB: No. No. Nope. Anybody that was up in that area before the plant started up if they wanted a job, they had a job. If they didn't want a job, that was fine too. Some of them, rather than work at Great Canadian Oil Sands, found opportunity in businesses that support that. So no, there was, it was quite welcomed for the most part, although there were obviously a few from the, from the village that, "Oh, it's too big now." I mean, we got that in the '80s, you know, when the plant or the McMurray area took another jump of 10,000 or whatever it was. "It's getting too big." So, water under the bridge.

AD: So it's still ... So you would say that the rub really comes between, you know, those temporary workers and that really are just in to do their job, earn money, and get out, that there is the friction. But that the plant people have really been integrated by and large.

GB: Oh yes, ya. Once you're employed at the plant, I mean, you're a member of the community and you intermix with everybody else in social settings, you know, ball leagues, whatever.

AD: So what was the life like? You've talked about your professional life and it gave you great satisfaction. What about the rest of it?



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GB: It was a nice little community. When we started, there was about 60 to a hundred there. You know, the schools were small. The town was condensed in the valley of what is now Fort McMurray. There were, you know, a few grocery stores, not a lot of amenities. There was a swimming pool, but it didn't open for a couple of years after we got there. There was a golf course opened up I think just before I went up to Fort McMurray. Not a big course or a fancy course, but enough for folks to putt around on. There was always a skating rink and a curling rink, because, you know, that's just what you do in Alberta. There wasn't a heck of a lot. TV was virtually non-existent, until they brought in some pre-recorded material that reran for about four hours every night. It was quite a number of years before we got any TV service that was greater than that. The power supply for the town site was produced by some big diesel generators, so whenever they shut down you were in the dark, which happened fairly frequently. But I mean the town itself was a fairly comfortable little place. Everybody knew everybody. The mix between staff and bargaining unit in a social setting was completely invisible. It didn't matter because, you know, you're visiting with neighbours or even on a shift we used to frequently have shift parties with the shift supervisor and everybody that worked under him, and everybody was just Joe. Everybody had a good time.

Kids going to school after they were old enough. Good decent schools, close by. You know, the kids played outside all the time. We had a dog and the two boys, and they'd go out and the dog would follow them, and if they went into a neighbour's house down the block to visit with those kids, the dog would sleep on the step until they came out to go home. And everybody did that. It was quite safe and common and nobody gave it a second thought.

That really didn't change until I'm thinking probably into the '80s, late '80s, when it started to get very busy, a lot more transient people either up there on exploration, because there was a lot of checking out the wilderness for other sites and testing leases that were under contract to the provincial government. They had to do a certain amount of work on them occasionally to keep their lease. And then a lot of construction started. Syncrude starting up in '78 added a huge population lift to the town. But once that initial surge settled down, it was not a whole lot different than the early '70s for the average person in the street. You could go into the grocery stores and the shelves were stocked. You could go out to a restaurant, a limited selection of restaurants, but go out to a restaurant. It didn't really change until the large construction boom started for both Syncrude and ourselves into the '90s, late '90s.

AD: The new royalty regime post 1993.

GB: I'm sure that was large in spurring some of the construction, but from the person on the street what they started seeing was, you know, they couldn't get into restaurants unless they managed to find one that took reservations and booked in advance. Grocery stores, if you weren't there when



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they opened there might be limited selection on the shelves later in the day. It was crazy. Parking in town, because ... And at that time, some of the construction started alternating shifts as well, so that some of the activities in town was busy for more parts of the day from people on their days off. It was really noticeable to local residents. It was also noticeable to local residents who were working in town and had to drive from their home to their work site. You know, where it used to take them five or ten minutes it might take them half an hour because there was just more traffic than roadway for a long period of time.

AD: Now, there's one thing work related that I just forgot to ask. In terms, ... were you involved in any of the Aboriginal programs, in terms of hiring?

GB: Only on the fringe in as much as we'd have discussions with the union about, you know, X, Y, or Z having to do with Aboriginals, but very limited involvement.

AD: Now, you know, just to get you to maybe reflect on the years that you spent in this industry and looking at the way that it is portrayed by people who oppose further development of the oil sands and the scale, of course, you know, has increased enormously, and that the first 20 or 25 years very little money was there to be made, but, of course, now everybody extrapolates from the current situation back. So the negativity around development, carbon footprint, environmental impact, you know, any of that stuff. Do you want to comment on that?

GB: Again, I've been on the fringe of that, but because I was in a staff position and got a barrage of communications on many of those issues, I was aware of what was going on. I knew that there was some environmental things that were going on. I knew that Suncor was doing a lot of things from very early on to conserve water to do, you know, different things, soften the blow on the environment. And, you know, some of the technology was such that, tailings ponds, for example, just took a long time to settle out and become clean. The new technologies that were developed after I retired have turned that whole process from a 30-, 40-year time cycle to a few years. Where there used to be a need for multiple tailings ponds, there may only be a need for a single tailings pond at some point not too long in the future, because technology allows cleaning it up and separating the residual oil and solids out of the water to reuse the water a lot easier than it used to be.

AD: Did you feel that the whole issue now, which is you'll read something about it virtually every week in the newspaper or the television set, about various kinds of pollution—air pollution, water pollution—did you feel when you were living out there, up there, that this was an issue at all?



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GB: To myself and most people that I knew in the community it was a non-issue. There were occasions, very rare occasions, where there was a plant upset and the wind was in the right position that the city of Fort McMurray would have some odours. I golf at a little place in west Edmonton. There's a recycle plant in the industrial area there that creates more stink than I noticed in Fort McMurray ever in my 34 years. Water pollution. Went to great lengths to keep the water on the site, including the rain water that drained off the mine fields in a place where we could extract the water from it, or the oil from the water, and make sure the water was clean before anything got close to the river. You get a downpour, there was more tar sand flushed into the river prior to the startup of the plant, just natural erosion into the water, I'm fairly certain than we ever dumped in there accidentally or deliberately. It's always been draining into the Athabasca River. I mean, it's always been an overblown somebody on a soapbox to me. And some of those people have no idea the significance of the economic development from whence they reside. But it's a soapbox.

AD: Is there anything else you want to share with me?

GB: I think that's pretty much a wrap. It's been a blast.

AD: Thank you, thank you.



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