
NED GILBERT

Date and place of birth (if available):

Date and place of interview: February 16, 2012

Name of interviewer: Peter McKenzie-Brown

Name of videographer: Peter Tombrowski

Full names (spelled out) of all others present:

Consent form signed: Yes

Transcript reviewed by subject:

Interview Duration:

Initials of Interviewer: PMB

Last name of subject: GILBERT

PMB: Okay, I am talking to Ned Gilbert. It is the 16th of February in the year 2012. This is for the Oil Sands Oral History Project. Ned is now having someone prepare his memoirs and of course he has been written up in quite a number of books. And so we are not going to do the standard interview that I do with the oil sands project, but I am going to ask Mr. Gilbert to discuss his career from around 1945 to approximately 1960 when he was working for... most of the time he was working for Sunoil Company. So would you tell us a little bit about that, just as a general start-up?

GILBERT: Well as the story says, I came to Canada. There were just two of us, Mr. Storm and I had worked together in Nova Scotia the previous year. And then I went to Indiana to learn how to set up wells and I came here in January '45. And we lived in the Palliser Hotel which was really quite a nice place to live. Although, there was also my office so it wasn't fancy by any means. But when winter came, Mr. Pew was an old retired Sunoil employee and...

PMB: This is J. Howard Pew that you're talking about?

GILBERT: No, I'm talking about Mr. Dunlep.

PMB: Oh sorry.



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GILBERT: No-no, Mr. Storm who...

PMB: Okay.

GILBERT: I'm sorry about that, Mr. Storm who I worked for in Nova Scotia. And when winter came he being an old retired person said, "I don't want to stay here in the winter." and went back home to the States. He lived somewhere near Nevada and left me in charge. While he was gone I did geology and wrote; made a map on the work surface when there were very few wells. And so I developed a large curving area that came down from through Saskatchewan, across Saskatchewan to Alberta. And then I wrote a report on it and sent it Philadelphia and they approved my getting land. They probably had no concept that I was about to avile on million acres in Alberta and negotiated for a million three hundred thousand for this, from the CPR in Saskatchewan. So by the following spring when the seismograph courier returned I had roughly two and half million acres of additional land for them.

PMB: This is what year now? 1946?

GILBERT: Probably... probably it was '46.

PMB: '46.

GILBERT: Because in '46...

PMB: And you were how old at that time?

GILBERT: Ah, 24.

PMB: 24. Okay.

GILBERT: It is really wonderful being a manager of a company at 23 and 24. When you got introduced to Jack Bevel, you probably never knew Jack but he was...

PMB: How do you spell that?

GILBERT: Bevel. B-E-V-E-L. He was the head of Gulf; maybe B-A. One day at an annual, at a... he had his directors up for a meeting in the penthouse of the Palliser. He introduced me to the president of the company and he said, "This is Ned Gilbert, he is the geologist, he is the land man, he is the manager of the office." And this guy and I had a discussion afterwards and he said, "You do all those things? There is nobody else?" And I said, "I am also the secretary."

PMB: Do your own vacuuming.

GILBERT: "And the draftsman." Well he lived in Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia was our head office, was very close and he said, "I'm going to go back and talk to someone. I'm intrigued."



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PMB: That they would do such a thing. Now, moving... and so you were, you had that role until George Dunlep arrived in Calgary?

GILBERT: Well first of all, in '46 at the end of the summer I went back to finish my university degree and I came back in the spring of '47 and I still was the only one here. So for most of '47 I was the only employee. Gradually I started to hire staff. We lived in the Burns Building. And then later we moved to what is the present location of the Glenbow. I forgot it was...I think it was called the Blow Building, but I'm not certain about that.

PMB: How do you spell it: B-L-O-W?

GILBERT: B-L-O-W I believe, but I'm not certain about that. There was a Blow Building further west on 8th Avenue. In any event, whatever it was, it became the Glenbow. And I had probably acquired ten or twelve employees by that time, geologists mostly. So after that they sent up a man named George Bentley to be our manager. We were going to drill a well at Langdon. I had bought the drilling rig on my expense account, but you will find that story in many places. And for example, Philadelphia sent up a man to present me with a cashier's cheque. And I joked with him that I thought I would to Mexico with it. And I'm afraid he thought I would because he was most upset. But I put it in my expense account and wrote a cheque on my expense account to buy this hundred thousand dollar drilling rig from Sunoil. Mr. Bentley...

PMB: I'm sorry, you weren't buying the rig? You were hiring it?

GILBERT: I bought it!

PMB: You bought it. Really!

GILBERT: Lock, stock and barrel.

PMB: For a hundred thousand bucks.

GILBERT: Today it's much more expensive. Mr. Bentley was experienced with drilling wells in damp area and some seem to think this was a damp area. They wound up putting down 2x12s and 12x12s and everything else into this slew, where we were about to drill, which is now part of Langdon. And we drilled the Sun Langdon Well there. In the course of it Mr. Bentley, I won't say what he did wrong, but he did several things wrong. And he was given an opportunity to leave. He was replaced by George Dunlep.

PMB: And that was in 1950, Dunlep?

GILBERT: '49 or '50.

PMB: '49, okay.



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GILBERT: And George gave me the opportunity to either be head of the land or head of geology. And I had found land much more interesting than geology and so I accepted the land management job for a while. Hilton Westmore became our chief geologist.

PMB: Who is that?

GILBERT: Hilton Westmore.

PMB: W-E-S-M-O-R-E?

GILBERT: No. W-E-S-T-M-O-R-E.

PMB: Thank you.

GILBERT: He is deceased. Most everybody is deceased.

PMB: From that era, I would think.

GILBERT: Yes. And George gave me enough freedom that I could do almost anything I wanted and that is when I started. I had already acquired land before sighting the oil sands. It was in the vicinity of Bitumount. Bitumount is where Karl Clark is. And it was in that '51 letter I recommended the land which became GCOS. But for some reason or another we bought more Bitumount land first and I don't remember the exchange that caused that. So I pressed that we should proceed to see if we could find the owner of Abasands land and I got permission to go to Toronto. I negotiated with Douglas Robinson who owns Canadian Oil Company as well as Abasand. And, subsequent to that, Sunoil Company decided to take over the negotiations and it did not fall together so the Philadelphia office took over. And then I heard the deal he made, I was told that I went white. And I must have written another letter because many years later, I was in the Jones Black legal firm and Max Jones introduced to me a Bob Brown. And Bob said, "Are you initials E.E. Gilbert?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Your company should have followed your advice about 20 years ago."

PMB: Now what was the problem with the terms that they got for that land?

GILBERT: They had a... I never saw... I don't remember the specific working, but the effect was when the price of oil went up, the royalty went up. The price of oil is much higher than it was then.

PMB: Right.

GILBERT: Around three dollars a barrel then. And, as I say, I wrote a letter and I don't have a copy of that letter. So I can...

PMB: And this was the Bitumount property?

GILBERT: No. That was the GCOS property.



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PMB: I'm sorry. I'm not familiar those properties. Could you explain that, please?

GILBERT: Bitumount is about 30 miles further north. GCOS is where the mine started.

PMB: Oh, I see.

GILBERT: After that an interesting story happened...

PMB: Before you leave that, you say JC WES. How do you spell that?

GILBERT: What did you say?

PMB: It sounded like JC WES. You said the JC WES property?

GILBERT: No. Don't know that name.

PMB: The one where you built the mine.

GILBERT: We built the mine at GCOS. G-C-O-S.

PMB: G-C-O-S. I'm sorry.

GILBERT: Great Canadian Oil Sands.

PMB: That's right, Great Canadian Oil Sands.

GILBERT: Right. I was in my office and Mr. Summerville phone me. Mr. Summerville was a director of mines.

PMB: Hubert Summerville.

GILBERT: Hubert Summerville. He said, "Ned, we've got a little problem. We've plotted out where lease number four is." That was the lease I wanted to buy and we had by that time. He said, "It doesn't include the outcrop." And I said, "Is it available?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "I'll be in your office in the morning with a cheque." That became lease number 86. We had lease number four, it was GCOS and 86 is the outcrop. As Hubert said, "You're about to dig through it and you will be in trespass before you even start."

PMB: Now do you want to continue on this or can I... tell me when you're done and I can just start asking you some more questions.

GILBERT: I'll stop and you can ask me more questions.

PMB: Well there were a couple of things. I've read your resume and I've read about you in various books. I want to clarify a few things which are very important to us. You acquired for Sunoil in the



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early 50s the original four leases. I think it was four leases, or was it six leases that the so-called Count von Hammerstein, Alfred von Hammerstein...

GILBERT: Yes.

PMB: ...basically got title to in 1910. Can you tell me that story? Because when I was reading this I was a bit confused. It sounded as though Sun had it for a while and then it went it back?

GILBERT: It has moved all over the place.

PMB: And Eric Harvey was somehow involved in this, who of course was the...

GILBERT: Eric Harvey had acquired it from von Hammerstein. I think in payment of money that Harvey had loaned him as he was working on oil sands. He did a lot of work I believe, in the... up near Bitumont, but I never saw it. Anyhow...

PMB: We're talking about Alfred von Hammerstein?

GILBERT: Yes. And that's how I believe Harvey acquired it from von Hammerstein. I never met von Hammerstein. And I negotiated with Harvey but Harvey wanted to keep surface. And I said, "Mr. Harvey, we need the surface to mine it." And he said, "Well ask your engineers how much land they're going to mine every year and we can move it along as like a floating lease on it." So they only wanted 40 acres and I put 160 acres in the agreement. And of course, they wanted more land. And they told me, told Mr. Dunlep, to get rid of that agreement. And so George told me to get rid of it. And so I tried to find Mr. Harvey so I could sell it back to him. Turned out he was in the Caribbean on a yacht and he was ill. And had told his management, "Don't let anybody come and see me." So Hodd Meech in the Calgary office refused to let me see him.

PMB: That's Hod, H-O-D?

GILBERT: Hod, H-O-D; Meech, M-E-E-C-H.

PMB: Thank you.

GILBERT: He was head of Harvey's office in Calgary. And in due course, I sold it to Laurence Morisore, M-O-R-I-S-O-R-E. And, to make a long story short, Morisore sold it to Chevron and I believe Sunoil bought it from Chevron, but I'm not certain about that. Morisore sold it for a lot more money than he paid me.

PMB: Now how many leases were there that belonged to Hammerstein?

GILBERT: Six.

PMB: There were six. And how many acres did they involve?



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GILBERT: I think each one was two and a half sections.

PMB: And they go back to 1910 if I'm not mistaken.

GILBERT: One was immediately south of our mine and that's the one I wanted. So I bought all six, they all came together so to speak. The other five were strung down the river.

PMB: Why in the world did Harvey want to have some surface rights?

GILBERT: Damn... uh excuse me, I don't know.

PMB: You can say, "You're damned if you know."

GILBERT: I pressed him and pressed him and finally I took the agreement with a floating 160 acres. I have no idea why he would want the surface.

PMB: Now, I've heard there was a lawsuit over the ownership of those properties?

GILBERT: Oh, there was.

PMB: Well, when was that? And what was that about? Do you know?

GILBERT: I wasn't involved.

PMB: Well what year was it? Was it in the 60s or the 50s?

GILBERT: Oh, I would think it was later. I think it is the one that Mr. Brown said to me, that Sunoil should have accepted my letter. I think it pertained to that agreement that Winfield Gibbons made with Canadian Oils.

PMB: Oh, really.

GILBERT: I'm not certain of that.

PMB: Is there anything else you would like to say about that?

GILBERT: Well, I think it's interesting that I filed on the land that became fire... called Firebag.

PMB: F-I-R-E-B-A-G.

GILBERT: Right. I was told afterwards that the geologists just called it Gilbert's Folly because they didn't expect any oil sands. And I felt that the oil sands probably went at least to the Alberta border, getting thinner as they went. I was interested in the possibility of deeper oil sands because our Richardson Texas Research Laboratory fellows, a fellow named Cary Hardy, had told me that he was interested in doing in-situ work. He wanted to drill a hole down into the oil sands and build a fire



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and then pump it out through other wells. So when that was core drilled, that became Firebag; they found nine billion barrels. No slouch of a property. Now, I have also heard that Sunoil bought the property from the government. Well, I just filed on the land. And in those days, and I think probably even today, if the land is open, has never been touched by anyone else, you can simply file that. And that's what I did.

PMB: So in other words, you were not taking up an oil sands lease because nobody knew whether there were oil sands there or not.

GILBERT: I took an oil sands lease, yes.

PMB: Oh, okay. Basically, it was like being a prospector. You basically prospected... you claimed that, filed on it and then you...?

GILBERT: No, I didn't claim it. I went to Mr. Summerville, or his staff and I said, "I would like to get this property here..." It's about... I think there were four... I think it was eight miles wide all along and a couple miles long. And it basically fringed on acreage we were looking at west; and simply made application for it. I didn't stake it out. I didn't do anything like that. And then we core drilled it.

PMB: I'm having a little trouble understanding how that is different from the... what you're correcting is an error and I don't understand the error. I don't have a background in land.

GILBERT: I think you said we prospected it like prospectors.

PMB: I was using that as an analogy.

GILBERT: I simply applied for the land, got the land. The geologists picked locations and brought in a drilling rig and core drilled it.

PMB: Oh, okay. So the question was: the story that was originally out there is that you bought the Firebag lands at a Crown sale? That's the difference.

GILBERT: That's the story I've heard but that's not true.

PMB: And that's not true, right.

GILBERT: I filed on the land and made application for it at no cost other than the permit fees.

PMB: So there was no auction? No nothing?

GILBERT: No auction.



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PMB: Okay, now I understand the issue. It was called Gilbert's Folly. Nobody expected it to be worth anything. What can you tell me about today's... about Suncor's Firebag operations today?

GILBERT: I have never had anything to do with the drilling of it... well, maybe the oil drill.

PMB: Yeah, I understand that.

GILBERT: But, I was...I left Suncor in '72 and I'm sure it hadn't been drilled by that time.

PMB: We interviewed Rick George a couple... or, I interviewed Rick George a couple of months ago and he, you know, he basically was talking about Firebag as one of their absolutely, one of Suncor's great assets.

GILBERT: He didn't mention we have that.

PMB: He forgot to mention your name.

GILBERT: I said before. I don't think the geologists mentioned my name either, they thought it was theirs.

PMB: You wrote what you called, a famous letter. And I would like to clarify that, because I think that I made the same mistake in this history that I'm writing. Which is that, the decision, a lot of the decisions about Suncor, about oil sands development came from Philadelphia and the decisions were not to go ahead and not to do this.

GILBERT: It is, yeah.

PMB: What I think I heard you say, or read in this note, that actually the decisions were made locally?

GILBERT: The Blair Report presentation was made.

PMB: That was in 1950.

GILBERT: I don't know the date. It was after George Dunlep had come, because I wanted to go to the meeting. And he decided that the geologist should go. And after the meeting, my suspicion is that his friends in the oil business who were presidents from other oil companies, probably made a pitch to him to not go ahead with the oil sands. The effect was that, if Sun or Syncrude went ahead with the oil sands, the government was going to carve out a portion of the current production. That they would have for the mine; because you couldn't run the mine and close it down every other day. So the oil companies were going to have to carve out a piece of oil production that Sun or Syncrude could have as theirs, their share. And I think that's why George and Lloyd Miller, who had been to the Blair Report.



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PMB: That's Lloyd Miller. M-I-L-L-E-R.

GILBERT: And his first name is L-L-O-Y-D. He was assistant manager. I'm quite sure that's why they decided that they did not want to go ahead with the oil sands.

PMB: So the issue that they were facing was that you had a rapidly growing light oil production in Alberta. And all of a sudden, the oil sands... if a big new project came on stream it would have to compete with that oil in the open market. And you know this would cause... the light oil producers thought this would be a problem. Probably the oil sands producers thought that the cost of producing this stuff would make it less competitive. Does that kind of sum up the issues?

GILBERT: Well, that might be, but I think the effect was that... Alright, we had production rates in those days. You were only allowed to produce, my recollection is that a percentage of your production each day.

PMB: So if a well could produce a hundred barrels a day, you would only produce 60?

GILBERT: So if we wanted to produce thirty-one thousand five hundred barrels per day that had to come out of the quota. And we couldn't run the mine opening and shutting it.

PMB: Okay, so this is called pro-rationing.

GILBERT: Pro-rationing. So we couldn't stand that.

PMB: And so George Dunlep was really concerned that, you know, how could you operate a mine in that environment.

GILBERT: No. George Dunlep was concerned that his pals would be very unhappy.

PMB: Ah. Oh, isn't that interesting.

GILBERT: And that's quite a different story.

PMB: Okay, so what happened?

GILBERT: George and Lloyd decided not to go ahead with the oil sands and that's when I wrote my letter and I said, "I don't think we should shut it down." And I told... you don't have to read the letter, but I sent copies to head office. And head office knew how Mr. Pew felt. They didn't ask Mr. Pew. He didn't come out and tell us to do it. Those four men I wrote to, told George, "We want to go ahead with the oil sands."

PMB: That's very interesting, now there's a very famous story...

GILBERT: George is dead too, so we can't...you can't ask him.



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PMB: He can't correct you.

GILBERT: But, what you're saying is the name incorrectly. It is not Dunlop. Dunlop was the president of Sunoil company (L-O-P). George was Dunlep, L-E-P.

PMB: Dunlep. Thank you. Now let me go back a step. In this book by Paul Chasco, he mentions an interview between J. Howard Pew and George Dunlep just before Dunlep came to Calgary.

GILBERT: That's correct.

PMB: And Pew said... Pew really believed in the oil sands. His company had studied it carefully in the early 1940s, and he said, "George, I want you to be very careful, we want to always have a stake in the Canadian Oil Sands."

GILBERT: That, I think, is absolutely correct.

PMB: So this being the case, I find that this story and I'm not suggesting the story isn't correct. I find this story surprising.

GILBERT: I quite agree, but I mean you can't find George to ask him. That certainly was my interpretation at the time.

PMB: And now to develop the GCOS project, which group...there were two projects from the 30s and 40s that were sort of outstanding. One was the Abasand and the other one was the Bitumount. There was a little bit of development on each of them. Now which of those properties did Suncor eventually... or, groups of people, did Suncor eventually become associated with?

GILBERT: Both.

PMB: Can you explain that, please?

GILBERT: When I first acquired lands up there, Abasand was a non-entity that I didn't know who they were. And I acquired land next to Bitumount; the Bitumount mine that Karl Clark had. And when we core-drilled that we got relatively poor results, so that's why I recommended that we move again to see if we could find the Abasand owner. When we got the Abasand owner we... Abasand lease, we hit with a great exuberance and we core-drilled it thoroughly before we started any mining. And we got good results at the Abasand property; much better oil on a quantity and quality.

PMB: Do you remember the name of the person who at that time owned the Abasand property?

GILBERT: Yes. Canadian Oil Company. I've told you.

PMB: And that was owned by... was that Lloyd Champion?



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GILBERT: No. It was actually owned by Shell Oil, in my opinion. I don't quite know how Lloyd Champion came in, but there was a company called Abasand. And they were owned, in part, by Shell and Canadian Oil Company. I don't know the whole relationship. I dealt with Douglas Robinson who worked for both Shell and Abasand. I think Abasand might have been a subsidiary or something, but I don't remember that relationship. All I know is that when I went to Toronto and tried to figure out who Abasand was, I found myself talking to Douglas Robinson of Abasand.

PMB: Now, I just want to check something. Maybe I will do that in a few minutes. I thought, and this was one of the questions I wanted to ask you about. It was... I think this fellow mentions and the book that I have here is Black Bonanza, by a fellow named Alastair Sweeny. He mentions a person who owned those properties. I'm going to check it later on coffee and I'll ask you about it.

GILBERT: I have found that confusing and the various stories that I've heard other people tell about how this group of people, including Champion, came to be part of Abasand. When I drove Karl Clark to the Energy ERCB hearings on the oil sands these guys were in my back seat. I hardly knew them.

PMB: Lloyd Champion and a...

GILBERT: Mostly his lawyers, or somebody's lawyers. We didn't become friends. Tom Clark and I became good friends.

PMB: Tom Clark?

GILBERT: He was the engineer who... he had been part of the atomic bomb.

PMB: Oh, right. That was Rich...

GILBERT: But, in addition to that he worked for...

PMB: Oh, I'm sorry he was involved with the...

GILBERT: Development of the atomic bomb.

PMB: In Chicago, really?

GILBERT: Yes. He lives in the Bahamas. He's still alive, I think. Anyhow, there are pieces that...the stories don't fit in my opinion, but they were always there. I suppose they came along with shares of Abasand. I mean they may have had shares, or there's a whole period right in there that I wasn't involved in directly.

PMB: I tried to unravel that and at one point it seems as though Lloyd Champion, you know, took his properties to Toronto and developed a company called Oil Sands Limited, I believe it was called.



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GILBERT: I think that might be.

PMB: And then, you know, because he had the properties he got a bunch of shares in this. And then he got a bunch of Toronto investors, wealthy Toronto investors, to put money in. But then the story really begins to fail after that.

GILBERT: So, anyhow, as the project was, I took Tom Clark to all the meetings. But, shortly after that I was asked to step aside of the oil sands, because Toronto and Philadelphia were going to take over the operation of the project up there. Build houses for people and, anyhow...

PMB: Right. They were going to build a little town. That was part of the development.

GILBERT: Right. Basically I was, shall we say, told to step aside.

PMB: You had the option? Okay.

GILBERT: I wasn't told I was retired, no-no, they just didn't want me directly involved with their day-to-day affairs with the government.

PMB: Okay. Now, I would like to go back again and I'd like to talk about J. Howard Pew. Because you were at a very famous meeting and I would like to get your comments on that. I would like you to tell me a little bit about what you know about him, because in the piece that I'm writing right now I'm considering him one of the six great oil sands visionaries.

GILBERT: He certainly should have been. Somebody should build a statue for him. You know one of the interesting things is that the Glenn Meade Trust, which was Mr. Pew's... it became... they sponsored Greenpeace. Greenpeace is doing its damndest to kill the oil sands. The Glenn Meade Pew Foundation, look it up anywhere, it's a big foundation. Anyhow...

PMB: Actually in today's Globe and Mail, CESIS, the Canadian... has announced that they consider it an extremist organization which is a risk to Canada. Greenpeace. That was in today's Globe and Mail.

GILBERT: I saw that. I certainly agree.

PMB: Okay. Let's go back to Pew. It's my understanding that you're in the 2nd World War, Sunoil was looking at alternative energy suppliers, oil suppliers, and investigated a lot of options. And one of the things that J. Howard Pew became really enamoured of was the Canadian Oil Sands.

GILBERT: Yes.

PMB: Can you tell me anything more about that?



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GILBERT: I told you that when I first worked for Sun I worked for them in Nova Scotia. My immediate superior, Lynn Storm (I hope I got that correct before).

PMB: Sorry. Is his name Lloyd Storm, or Lynn?

GILBERT: Lynn Storm.

PMB: L-Y...

GILBERT: L-Y-N-N.

PMB: Okay.

GILBERT: During our work there in Nova Scotia he was sent to Ottawa and I thought to Calgary to find out, it turned out when he came back, he told me he was looking at oil sands. And I suspect he met with Ottawa on the oil sands. He didn't give me much about it. You asked about him... no, you asked about Mr. Pew. Many years later, I was asked to find one of our staff to send a report up to Mr. Pew at Jasper, where he was spending the summer. And I said, "I would like to do that." So I didn't send anybody. I sent myself. And George Dunlep and I figured out roughly how long it would take me to get there. I had to change clothes and drive, and it was raining buckets all the way. Anyhow, I had told Mr. Dunlep that I thought I could be there by 10:00 o'clock, 10:00 p.m. As I drove into the Jasper Park entry, here was the great man with his watch, standing out under the cover of the canopy...

PMB: We're talking about J. Howard Pew?

GILBERT: J. Howard himself. With his watch and when I finally arrived, he said, "You're late." I'd only driven from Calgary in the heavy rain, but that didn't bother him because I said I'd be there at ten. So he said, "Do you know anything about the oil sands?" and I said, "Yes, sir." And so we went and sat on the couch and he asked me questions about what area I thought the oil sands covered. And I told him that I thought it started about near Bitumount and carried all the way down to Lloydminster. On the back of an envelope we outlined that area. And somehow we got...

PMB: So this was at... you're going into midnight now.

GILBERT: Oh, definitely.

PMB: Okay.

GILBERT: We're sitting there on the couch. I'm sitting on the arm of the chair and he's sitting on the couch. Anyhow, we roughly calculated a trillion barrels. Now, I'm not an engineer. I mean, at least I can't calculate it by the way the engineers would calculate it. I just knew roughly how much I thought was in different places. And so we came up with a trillion barrels. Now I would be willing to bet that a trillion barrels is a pretty good darn figure.



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PMB: That's a number. Yeah, people would say that maybe one and a half trillion today.

GILBERT: Yeah. So that's what I told him and then finally he let me go. He expected me to turn around and go back to Calgary. He didn't know that I was going to go to the nearest hotel to sleep.

PMB: Isn't that... and so you spent the night and then you went on the next day?

GILBERT: I didn't see him again for... well I kept hearing stories, but a...

PMB: Tell me what year that was approximately?

GILBERT: It was before love songs, so it was like '69ish.

PMB: I'm sorry. You can't be right.

GILBERT: Oh no, it was before that.

PMB: '49.

GILBERT: Because we hadn't built the plant yet. We started to build it in '64 so it must have been '63ish. Because this was one of the reports recommending we build the thing.

PMB: So this was in 1963. So you've flipped forward quite a bit in time. That's very interesting.

GILBERT: We started in '64 and it was built by '67. It must've been ahead of that time. And then later on, it must've been more like '62 because when George and I delivered the report to Philadelphia, to Mr. Pew, and then he said, "I'm taking it to the board of directors." And he said, "I want you to sit there." He said...

PMB: Okay, now. Stop right there. I want you take this story right from the beginning. Tell me what...because this is a very famous story...

GILBERT: Yes, I know it is.

PMB: ... about the oil sands and you're probably the only person around who can tell this story.

GILBERT: Certainly the only one still alive.

PMB: So please start at the beginning.

GILBERT: We flew down to Philadelphia.

PMB: Year? What year was this?

GILBERT: I'm trying to figure it out...



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PMB: In the 50s?

GILBERT: ...but it was before we started the mine so it must've been '63ish. And I don't remember going into Mr. Pew's office. Anyhow, we must've... we presented the report to him and he said, "I'm taking this to the board of directors." And I don't remember the relationship of his office to the board of directors' room. But anyhow, we were in the room and the board of directors were at a big table here and he was standing at the head of the table and we were sitting at the side of the room. And he proceeded to tell his board that he wanted their approval for the company to build this project.

PMB: And this project was the Great Canadian Oil Sands Mining Project.

GILBERT: It was, yes. I don't remember whether they hummed and hawed but they weren't very happy about taking on this strange thing. I heard him say, "Gentlemen, either you approve this or I'm doing to do it on my own." Well that started... made up their minds that Sunoil better do it.

PMB: Now I think, at that time, can you tell me approximately how big Sunoil was and how... and I know that Mr. Pew was a very wealthy man. Roughly where did he stand in the category?

GILBERT: In the category of billionaires. It's my understanding that he was the seventh richest man in the United States with something like seven billion.

PMB: Number seven.

GILBERT: And J. N. Pew, his brother, also part of the company had one less billion than he did.

PMB: So he was eighth.

GILBERT: He was eighth.

PMB: He was number eight in the list of American billionaires. Now, and how big was Sunoil at that time, relative to the other big integrated oil companies?

GILBERT: When I first started, the company had 27,000 employees. Now, I have no idea...

PMB: So that was in '45?

GILBERT: ... how many more they might have acquired.

PMB: Now, I think what I've heard, and I don't want you know where I read this, that at one point it was the 11th largest oil company in the United States, or in the world. Private integrated oil companies.



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GILBERT: I could well imagine it was quite a different company then... it not only had refineries galore, it had a ship building yard. It had... and they built, you may remember the Glomar Challenger was one.

PMB: Oh, really.

GILBERT: And they also built the Manhattan that went through the Arctic. It had double-helm, and it went to the Pan-Arctic operation and it picked up a cargo of oil.

PMB: And they got involved in that if I remember correctly during the... was it the 1st World War when the tankers were being basically downed by German U-boats?

GILBERT: Very likely that's when they started, but I don't know that.

PMB: And that was when J. Howard Pew got involved in that line of business.

GILBERT: I see.

PMB: And at that time, I believe he was 30 years old or something. He was a young man.

GILBERT: One of the other stories that goes back to Mr. Harvey, if you don't mind. When I was negotiating with Harvey...

PMB: This is Eric Harvey?

GILBERT: Eric Harvey. He said, "I had chartered a yacht that I thought was pretty big. It was 111 feet long." And we pulled up to the dock or wharf in some place in the Caribbean. And he said, "A voice came down from on high, 'Hello down there, would you like to come up for a drink.' Well we looked up there and there was this enormous ship beside us. And they sent down an elevator, a platform for my wife and I to come up and have a drink. It was your Mr. J. Howard...no, it was your Mr..."

PMB: J. Howard Pew.

GILBERT: No, it wasn't J. Howard. It was his son.

PMB: Oh my lord!

GILBERT: It was Arthur Pew. And he said, "I couldn't believe it, the ship was 350 feet long."

PMB: Well what can I say, that's the size of a fairly substantial naval vessel.

GILBERT: A fairly substantial naval vessel. Arthur came to visit Calgary once when George and Lloyd were both in Philadelphia. I phoned down and asked what I should do and they said, "Answer



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his questions, honestly.” We flew in his plane all over Alberta while I pointed out oil fields and he pointed other places he owned across the world. Why he would have to impress me was beyond me.

PMB: Sorry, are we talking about Eric Harvey here?

GILBERT: No. We’re talking about Arthur Pew.

PMB: Arthur Pew. Oh really.

GILBERT: Oh, I’ve never flown with Eric.

PMB: So Arthur Pew then was involved in the company’s oil operations in Alberta?

GILBERT: No. He was simply up here to see what it looked like.

PMB: Oh, I see. Okay.

GILBERT: He ran the ship yards.

PMB: I understand.

GILBERT: It’s probably why he had a 350 foot.

PMB: Now, the story... I’m just going to...

GILBERT: Well, I’m afraid I backtracked and got off the target.

PMB: That’s okay. We’ll be able to make sense out of it when we see the transcript. One thing that’s quite interesting, you know that Bob McClements is coming here in...

GILBERT: I don’t think I ever met him really.

PMB: He used to be the CEO after Pew died. Now Pew died, he was... gosh was he almost 90. Around 1970 or ’71, I think. J. Howard Pew.

GILBERT: The plant was open in ’67 and he was there.

PMB: Yeah. There’s a very famous speech that he gave. But I believe that he died about four years later.

GILBERT: Might have been.

PMB: But anyway, Bob McClements who was actually the guy who operated, or who was in charge of construction of the Great Canadian Oil Sands.



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GILBERT: Yes.

PMB: Eventually became the CEO of Sunoco, Sunoil Company. And here's the story, he basically...

GILBERT: In Philadelphia?

PMB: In Philadelphia, yeah. Well the story is this and it's a very interesting one. I'm going to give him a...I'm interviewing him next month. Under his watch, Sun decided that it was going to get out of the petroleum business. It was going to focus on refining and marketing of consumer products. And so it sold. I think at that time Suncor, which it sold its interest in, had assets of about a billion dollars. Today Sunoco, Sunoil Companies' market capitalization is about I think it is four billion dollars. Suncor which is just this little thing that they spun off is worth around fifty billion.

GILBERT: Really.

PMB: And they did that in twenty years. They made the stupid decision to get out of the oil production business.

GILBERT: Well they had to get out of Canada. I mean the government required... somehow the government required that Sunoil Company cut itself from Suncor. And it wasn't called Suncor then, you would have to go back and find a different file.

PMB: They'd sold 25% of the plant to the Province of Ontario. According to Rick George when we talked about it, he just said, "Sunoil needed money, and Ontario needed money." And so they basically both let their interests go public. They sold them in a public offering. Why don't we pause for a minute and get some more coffee.

[BREAK]

PMB: In this book, Black Bonanza, he references a fellow...he's talking about the Alberta Research Council which had the Bitumount operation, because of the provincial government's involvement with it during the 1940s. And I'm going to read this paragraph, "The oil industry lobbied Alberta to get out of direct investment in the oil sands business. And in 1955, the Alberta Research Council unloaded the whole Bitumount operation for a hundred and eighty thousand dollars to an entrepreneur named Stan Polson. Polson's Canamera Development Limited." and then it talks about some of the technologies that Polson's tried. It doesn't matter. "Polson unloaded the operation to the Imperial's Royalite Oil Company for a hundred and eighty thousand dollars plus royalties. Royalite, in turn, was taken over by Gulf Oil and eventually became the property of Suncor Energy." Does any of that make any sense to you?

GILBERT: No.

PMB: Can you help me with any of that? You ever hear of a guy named Stan Polson?



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GILBERT: Oh, I knew Stan. I knew Stan Polson. He had started doing some work with a laundry machine, trying to spin it.

PMB: That was the technology they mentioned in there.

GILBERT: But I didn't know he'd bought Bitumount and I don't know whether Gulf... that part I don't know.

PMB: Well I remember when Gulf, I used to work for Gulf and they did own Royalite.

GILBERT: That's what I...

PMB: And it was through Royalite...

GILBERT: Through Royalite.

PMB: ...that they became involved in Syncrude. I'm pretty sure.

GILBERT: I see. If you worked at Gulf in those days you should have known Jack Bevel.

PMB: This was in the late 70s. I don't remember.

GILBERT: Oh. He was probably gone by that time.

PMB: Okay, now. You started to tell a story, we're again talking about J. Howard Pew. You started to tell a story and this story kind of goes around a lot about him in Jasper. And I would really like you to help me clarify that, because when I ask Preston Manning about that... because one of the stories is that Preston Manning, or sorry, that J. Howard Pew and Ernest Manning, the Premier and their wives sometimes holidayed together in Jasper.

GILBERT: I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

PMB: Well, according to Preston that isn't true.

GILBERT: Oh, really.

PMB: Yeah. So help me clarify, help me understand that story.

GILBERT: We kept hearing stories back in the office about J. Howard taking over this point habit, but that wasn't the big thing. He played golf very slowly, but he would not permit anybody to go through. And the story I heard from golfers who tried to play when he was there, they would check first to see if J. Howard was going to play. If he was, they would wait until the afternoon or some other time. Pew was a very good golfer and he golfed his age, I know when he was 82.

PMB: Meaning he would shoot 82 when he was that age.



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GILBERT: He would shoot 82 when he was 82 and 83 when he was 83.

PMB: That's amazing.

GILBERT: Yes. But he always played with a golf-pro as his partner. I mean I never played with him but I kept hearing these stories from friends of mine in Calgary. The other story is that he always rented this point cabin. Point. There is a point that sticks out.

PMB: Oh, I see.

GILBERT: And this cabin occupies the point and I understood it rented for hundreds or thousands of dollars a day and Pew took it for the summer. He had a Gulfstream airplane that he flew in and his pilot had learned how to land on the grass strip of Jasper. I've also heard that a waiter or somebody became very ill, and the staff asked Mr. Pew if he would permit his plane to take the man to Edmonton, which he did. All in all, he's a real legend.

PMB: Now do you know anything about his relationship with Ernest Manning, because when I talked to Preston that was what I wanted to find out. Preston gave as good information about that but, you know, he was a little bit vague because he was quite young at that time.

GILBERT: Well I can't tell you for sure, but Preston's father, Ernest certainly used to visit when Mr. Pew was there at Jasper. And whether they discussed the church, or whether they discussed the oil sands. I cannot tell you. And whether he stayed in the point cabin, I can't tell you. You know, you could... well anyhow.

PMB: It would make sense that he would maybe stay overnight there.

GILBERT: Yes. It would be. But Mr. Pew didn't offer me a chance to stay overnight.

PMB: Yeah, he expected you to drive straight home to Calgary.

GILBERT: Expected me to drive straight home to Calgary.

PMB: The next... I think we're probably almost done. I would like to ask you about any impressions you might have about Ernest Manning.

GILBERT: I had nothing to do with meetings with him other than that I heard... Fred Mannex had a man, a front man who worked for him. And his name may or may not come to me. Quite a big man I mean. He wasn't fat but he was a big, strong looking fellow. He was... if Mr. Mannex wanted something from the Alberta Government this man would go and make contact. He supported all of the government like the Conservatives, Liberals and the NDP. This man always gave a big contribution to each of them. Which probably came out of Mannex, but nobody ever knew.

PMB: Fred Mannex was the owner of what was the name of the construction company?



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GILBERT: Mannex.

PMB: I believe it was the biggest construction company in Canada...

GILBERT: But it was called Mannex.

PMB: ...at one time, wasn't it?

GILBERT: Yes. It did the initial work of building the plant and area. I mean mining.

PMB: For the GCOS plant.

GILBERT: Just at least at the start. So it's my understanding and it's always been my understanding that if Sun needed something from the Alberta Government, they would meet this man and Sun then would then meet with Premier Manning. Now in all my life I have never met with Premier Manning. I did meet Mr. Tanner, who became head of the Mormon Church...

PMB: Great. Well he...

GILBERT: ...was Premier Manning's right hand man.

PMB: And he was the energy minister in '47 and so when you first came to Calgary. Did you... hold on there was a thought coming into my head right then and I've forgotten now.

GILBERT: This man's name was Frank something or other. It'll come to me. But he could walk in Premier Manning's door and I don't know anybody else who could.

PMB: This is my question for you: the Blair Commission or the Blair Report came out... was released in 1949 and then there were two conferences. I think they were in 1950 and '51, or '51 and '52; major conferences on the oil sands in those years. And Ernest Manning's idea at that time was to have Blair share this report with the oil industry. Get people excited and get them to take out leases and develop it. Were you at either of those conferences?

GILBERT: No. Considerably, I was at the 50th one. I was told that...

PMB: I'm sorry, at which one?

GILBERT: 50. I was sitting in the front row, it was like a dinner. And, Mr. Tanner was talking I think. Anyhow, somehow a picture was taken of Mr. Tanner and I'm Right Square in the middle of the picture because I'm down here and he's up there. But, somehow, I never saw it but I was told that my picture was Right Square in the middle of...



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PMB: And of course it was Tanner who... because it sounds like that conference. It was Tanner who said, "Here is what our policy will be in respect of the oil sands." And then after doing, many companies... you might have even been inspired by this when... started giving leases.

GILBERT: No. I had already been doing oil sands. We were up there in '47, '48, '49...

PMB: So you were already one of the big property holders in the oil sands areas?

GILBERT: Not a big property. We were always a small property holder; lots of companies which had much more land than we had. But they didn't want to go ahead with mines.

PMB: Would you say a little bit more about that, please?

GILBERT: We did not have large holdings.

PMB: Sunoil Company.

GILBERT: Sun thought it was going to produce thirty-one thousand five hundred barrels a day. Not a million barrels a day. We were going to mine that four section lease in 30 years. They did it in four.

PMB: When GCOS opened.

GILBERT: When Suncor opened.

PMB: Yeah. Okay sorry, I'll leave it to you. I think we're pretty close to the end of our interview.

GILBERT: Oh. I obviously didn't go to the '51 conference because that's when I wrote my letter. I was not allowed to go to the meeting. George and Lloyd, and probably Westmore decided to turn it down. That's when I wrote my letter.

PMB: Oh, okay.

GILBERT: My famous letter as I call it.

PMB: Your famous letter, yeah. My last question to you: thinking over what we've talked about over the last 45 minutes or an hour, what can you tell me that will astound me?

GILBERT: That will astound you?

PMB: That will astound me. That we haven't talked about so far.

GILBERT: I picked up a lot more acreage for Sun. Whether they ever used it I don't know. I negotiated with... There was a fellow who owned oil sands leases right next to the place where the fire burned.



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PMB: Firebag.

GILBERT: No-no. There was a fire... They had a mine right there in Fort McMurray and I got lands from him. I also got lands surrounding Amoco property. I call it Gregoire Lake and we surrounded Amoco. And we knew they were doing an underground fire flood project. So I sent our company plane up to try to take pictures. Well they couldn't take pictures off the window properly. So I persuaded them to put a photographic thing in the floor.

PMB: A camera.

GILBERT: Well that meant that they had to cut a hole in the floor of our company plane. And they weren't very happy but they got permission to do this. Every week I had them taking pictures of the operation and sending the pictures down to the Richardson Research Lab for analysis of what they were doing.

PMB: Can you remember roughly what year that was?

GILBERT: I would think it was during that period when were actually building the mine.

PMB: So it was early 60s.

GILBERT: '64.

PMB: Okay. That's an extremely interesting little fact. I'm glad I asked you the question, anything else?

GILBERT: Another story is that almost half of our geological department in Calgary was up there working on core holes and things. And one story that surely ought to be captured, Bill Tisdall. He was working at the time, just ahead of this big bucket. And every time the bucket came up this way, every time the bucket hit a sand ledge it would break a tooth. And they had to stop it and reinstall a new tooth and that costs several hours of shut down.

PMB: Now this is the machine called a bucket-wheel...

GILBERT: Conveyer.

PMB: ...conveyer. Yeah.

GILBERT: And he kept asking permission to... he was drilling core holes ahead of us so he could determine where these ledges were, sand ledges, and kept asking permission to put a charge of dynamite. "Oh, we don't want you doing that. You might damage the plant." Well Buzz was not one to be stopped and went to the dynamite people and found out how he could do this process. And they gave him fuses and they gave him whatever you use to make the dynamite go off, and a small charge. I think he used a ten pound charge. And one day, when the management were out



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somewhere. San Francisco was the other place they visited frequently. So he put a couple of charges down just ahead of this bucket-wheel and the bucket-wheel drove like this, it was wonderful! It broke up those ledges. So when the management came back, they came up and watched him and he said, "I would like to put a 30 pound charge." "Don't you ask me, you didn't ask me before, just go right ahead and do whatever?" So after that he put 30 pound charges. And I understand they use 300 pound charges.

PMB: Now the irony of that is that I believe that at Bitumount they used explosives in the 1930s. So that technique had already been tried, but Suncor needed to be reminded about it.

GILBERT: In Bitumount?

PMB: In Bitumount they did do that. Absolutely, they did.

GILBERT: Did they really? That's interesting. I never heard of that.

PMB: I think that's it. Well thank you very much, Ned. It's been a real pleasure to talk to you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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