

PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY
OIL SANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

JANE MORRIS BEGAN WORK IN A TEMPORARY CAPACITY AT GREAT CANADIAN OIL SANDS (GCOS) IN 1966 AND SHORTLY AFTER SHE BECAME A FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE. SHE SPENT THE WHOLE OF HER CAREER THERE IN THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT UNTIL HER RETIREMENT IN 2004.

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: August 3rd, 1947 at Lacombe, Alberta

Date and Place of Interview: 10:25 am, May 28th, 2012, the residence of Jane and Art Morris (see below)

Sunridge Estates
1904 Millwoods Rd N W, Unit #1
Edmonton AB T6K 4E4
Email a.cotntop@shaw.ca
Tel. 780-465-9056

Name of Interviewer: Adriana A. Davies, CM, PhD

Name of Videographer: Jimmy Bustos

Consent form signed: Yes Initials of Interviewer: AD

Last name of subject: MORRIS

AD: My name is Adriana Davies and I'm a researcher/interviewer for the Petroleum History Society Oil Sands Oral History Project. It's the 28th of May at 10:25, and I'm in the home of Jane and Art Morris. Jane, can you tell me when you were born and where, and then give me a summary biography of your life and work at GCOS/Suncor, and then we'll drill down into specific questions; so just a potted biography.



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JM: Well, I was born in Lacombe, Alberta, in August of 1947.

AD: So tell me a bit about your career.

JM: I graduated from Lindsay Thurber Composite High School in Red Deer, and my first job was with the Toronto Dominion Bank in Red Deer. I was there until my ex-husband took a position with GCOS in 1966 and we moved up to Fort McMurray in 1966.

AD: And when did you get your job?

JM: I started temporary with GCOS in December of 1966, and I went permanent with them in March of '67.

AD: And you worked there until?

JM: I worked there until I retired in September of 2004.

AD: Tell me what it was like going up to Fort McMurray in 1966, which is pretty early in terms of the history of GCOS/Suncor.

JM: I didn't even know it was a road, but apparently it was a road, and it was just a gravel road up there. It was so, so cold. We went up in December of 1966, and, oh man, it was cold. We went to a trailer court just in Waterways, and we were in a little eight by 28 trailer until we moved into the company trailers in Birchwood, and they were huge [laughter], when you think of the small trailer that we had and then this one. And you couldn't go through the trailer park. You had a Nodwell that took you through because it was just all mud and muskeg. So, at the time, I was devastated, totally devastated. I thought that if I took one more step I'd fall off the world. But, you know, you became close knit, because everybody else was in the same boat as you were in.

AD: So what job did your ex-husband take on at that time?

JM: He was working in the mine as a P & H shovel operator. And I took a temporary job; well, in the purchasing department and I ended up going permanent in March of '67, when I worked for Chuck Knight. He was my first boss, and he later became mayor of Fort McMurray.

AD: Tell me about that early work.



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JM: There weren't very many of us. There were three girls when I started, and we more or less shared our duties. You know, if the Plant Manager's secretary was gone, someone went up and filled in for her. Or if the accounting manager's assistant was gone, you filled in for her. So we just helped out for whatever, but I was basically a clerk in the purchasing department when I first started out, and I later moved on to the HR department, where I worked in the labour relations area with Don Cadman and that group, and then on into the compensation and benefits area. That's where I spent most of my career, in compensation and benefits.

AD: So tell me what it was like working for the company. With respect to your duties, what would a typical day have been like?

JM: Well, the nice thing about working in a position like that is that you didn't have a typical day. You know, something could come up and you'd have to look after that. It wasn't just a standard, these are your duties, because if something else came up, you did it. I looked after all the deaths. I looked after the salaries, the pensions, benefits, so if we happened to have a death, or something like that, then you just stopped whatever you were doing and you attended to that. And of course, if they were having problems in labour relations, then you had to stop and help with that. So that was the nice part of it, because it wasn't like a standard, this is what you do every day. You know, it was something different all the time, and I think that's what made it more interesting.

AD: At that time, and of course still, there is that division between the staff positions and the workers, the unionized workforce. Do you want to tell me a little bit about that, what that was like and the numbers at the plant at that time?

JM: Well, of course I was in a position [to know the workers] because my ex-husband was in the Union, so I knew all the Union members. I never had a problem with Union versus Staff, ever, and my husband Art was in the Union, so I knew them all. Never, ever had any problem with them, with their bargaining issues or anything like that. There's a lot of things that I didn't like that they were bargaining for, but, it wasn't that we ever had arguments or anything like that with them. I knew both sides, so it was quite easy.

AD: And in those early days when you look back, how many men would there have been in the unionized positions and how many in the staff?

JM: Well, when I first started we rode in school buses, and I know the Staff had one school bus. And when we got to the theatre that was the last bus stop, we were full. And we had to pick up Lee Savage, and he used to bring a board with him, and he'd put it between the two seats and he'd sit on it. So I'm saying the Staff had a bus, plus one. And the Union, I do believe it was two or three buses of the Union people, because we travelled on different buses at that time, because the Union people



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started a bit earlier than the Staff people. So, it was probably a ratio of, you know, three or four to one.

AD: And they were actually building the plant, were they?

JM: Right, they were building the plant. It was still under construction. They had opening day in September of 1967.

AD: So you were there?

JM: I was there, yes.

AD: So what was that like? Tell me a bit about it.

JM: It was quite eventful. They had what we used to call a “bubble.” It was a big tent that was held up by air, and that’s where they had all the ceremonies and everything. And the Staff at the oil sands plant, the women, were down at the camp—babysitting and taking kids to movies and stuff like that so that the parents could have tours. It was a fairly big event for that time.

AD: Did you meet any of the company bigwigs?

JM: Oh, all of them. Yes.

AD: So can you tell me who was there?

JM: Well, Howard Pew was there, and Clarence Thatcher, Ken Hedden, Bob McClements, of course, was our Plant Manager. That’s the only ones I can think of with the company. And then they had all the government officials there, as well.

AD: So can you remember?

JM: For that kind of era, or whatever, 1967, it was rather a big deal, because, you know, you never got that many people together for an event that I ever knew.

AD: So Premier Manning would have been there.

JM: Mmm, mmm.

AD: So who else?

JM: Oh, I’m not sure of all the names. I had a picture ... We had a picture one time and we had been asked ... They had sent it to me and asked if I knew everyone at the table, because nobody could remember who they were. And I could say all of them, but I don’t know where that picture is [laughter]. There were just a lot of officials there.



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AD: Working in the personnel area, you would have seen first-hand how the workforce grew and where they came from. Do you want to talk a bit about that?

JM: Well, most of the ones when they started at the plant, most of them were from Alberta. They were farmers or, like my husband, working in the oil field or whatever. Later on when the plant started to progress and—I always used to say when they paved the roads—is when we got people from other parts of Alberta. We did get a lot of people from Newfoundland and Ontario. Of course, probably from B.C., Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, but the most that I noticed were from Ontario or Newfoundland. But that didn't happen until probably about 1974, when Syncrude first started up, and then you had more people wanting to get employment.

AD: So do you want to talk about the work conditions, pay, benefits, all of that stuff?

JM: Well, the work conditions when we first started. The offices that they had us in when we were in purchasing had no insulation. So in the winter time, they actually gave us ice scrapers so we could scrape our desks off in the morning when we got to work. We were all in the same position. It wasn't as though you had a better office than I had or anything. We were all in the same position. It was kind of humorous some times. And compensation and benefits—they've always had the top compensation and benefits, as far as I'm concerned. We used to do salary surveys all the time, and we were always in the top quartile. And we surveyed the oil industry as well as any major places like the city or the hospital where they have equal types of jobs. So, I was always happy with the salary and benefits of the company. They had the best, bar none, as far as I'm concerned.

AD: So in the late '60s, what would that have been like? Give me a snapshot of what pay and benefits would have been like, and any other incentives.

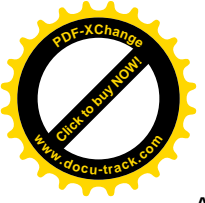
JM: Well, in 1967 I started there at \$350 a month; that was what my salary was, and I really thought I was doing good! Mind you, you have to take it in perspective too, because everything else, the price of things was par to what you were making, and at that time they still had the good benefits. Your benefits were major medical, dental, all of that was paid.

AD: Was there a company pension scheme?

JM: There was a company pension plan that was compulsory to join at age 30, but you could join it at age 25 if you wanted to. And then, I do believe it was in 1980, that it became non-contributory and so anybody at age 21 was automatically enrolled in the pension plan, and it was a defined benefit pension plan. It was really nice, because a lot of people in their early twenties or thirties, would they really join a pension plan? This way, you were automatically enrolled, and actually it was for our benefit too, you know.



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AD: So I heard that there was also a savings plan, a subsidized housing scheme. Do you want to talk about that?

JM: Everybody had subsidized housing in 1967, and you could get into a house with no down payment. You made the mortgage payments. And if you were there 10 years, originally, then you could just take over the house. It would be in your name and you could take over the payments. Like, you always made the payments, but then the home became yours.

AD: So, sort of like a rent-to-purchase?

JM: And then later on it was eight years of service. And then when we went out of the housing business, it was the same as anywhere else. You went and bought a house. You put a down payment on it, and you got a mortgage.

AD: When did they go out of the housing business?

JM: I was trying to think of that. Our housing arm was Athabasca Realty, and, I think it was in the mid '80s, '86, '85 maybe. And Syncrude as well had the same type of housing as we had and, I do believe, they went out of the housing business within a year or two of us, because by then there were houses there that you could purchase the same as you would in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere else, so it was easier to get a home then. But when we went up there, there were no homes.

AD: What about the company savings plan?

JM: The company savings plan started in, gee I should know all these things, it started in I'm going to say it started in about 1990. It could have been a little bit earlier. And it was the best savings plan bar none. If you contributed 10 percent to the savings plan, the company matched it 7.5 percent. You'd be pretty hard pressed to get 7.5 percent interest anywhere. Originally, you had to be in the plan for four years before you could withdraw your first year's contributions. There were a lot of mixed reviews on that. I myself preferred that, because I don't save money. This way, I couldn't get at it. But a lot of people weren't happy about that. Syncrude had a plan where you could withdraw from every year, so of course we eventually went with a plan where you could withdraw it at the end of every year. Regardless, it was a very good plan. It was just exceptional. And then, later on, out of that savings plan if you wanted to redirect 3 point ... 1.5 percent to what was called a PRA, a personal retirement account, the company would match that 100 percent. And, the personal retirement account, of course, you use after you retire to buy yourself another pension. So, it was all company money. Where else can you get another pension plan with oil company money?



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AD: Was there workforce stability or did people come and go in that early era?

JM: In the early era, a lot of them stayed. You take the original ones, the ones from Alberta, you know, they all stayed, because it was good work for them. But they also had their farms they could fall back on and previous jobs that they had that they could fall back on. I think it got a little more difficult - there was a little more movement when Syncrude came in. And then, you know, the grass is always greener. They would go to Syncrude - some employees would go to Syncrude, but then we'd get some Syncrude employees, too. It was very stable until you get up into the '90s, and that's more the norm, that people don't stay as long at a job. They move on to another job.

AD: Really, in terms of the personnel area, there was relative stability until certainly the '80s and that period up to the strike in 1986. Do you want to talk about those labour relations and those personnel aspects?

JM: Well, I can't talk too much to the labour relations part, but as far as my department or myself was concerned, I always had good rapport with the Union people. Now, I know a lot of people didn't. You know, your upper management, of course, there was horns locking all the time. But the strike of '86 was probably the worst one that I was in. And that meant six months working at a different job. I worked at the Light Vehicle Fleet, and I worked seven at night until seven in the morning. I usually went up to my job, my regular job, and worked three hours or something. And then off to bed, and back to the Light Vehicle Fleet, which I did not like [laughter]. Everybody was nice, and everything, but that isn't the job I applied for, and it really wasn't the one I wanted [laughter]. But it was an experience.

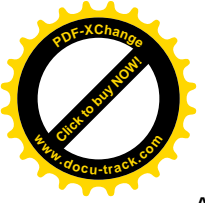
AD: So what would your typical day in this area ...? Talk about crossing the picket line.

JM: Well, crossing the picket line. You know, when we had the strike of 1969, everybody was green at it. We didn't know what we were doing, and our bus comes up to the picket line and we said, "Are we supposed to cross or what are we supposed to do?" And the Union guys, they said, "Well, cross for now, and we'll figure it out later."

We said, "Well, okay. Goodbye, have a good day." So the strike of '69 was very good. The one of 1978 was getting a little bit more organized on the unions' part. And, still, they were all very good; at least, all very good to me. I mean, again, there were a lot that locked horns with upper management or maybe some supervisory people, but things moved on. And, then, the strike of '86, it was so long. I think that at the beginning, there was quite a bit of heat and pressure with a lot of things. And, as you got into it, because it went on for almost six months, you sort of said, "Well, oh dear," because it went on for way too long.



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AD: Now you mentioned union leadership and management locking horns. Did you get a sense of the other issues that were prompting this, besides the personalities?

JM: No, I didn't, because, again, I wasn't in the labour relations area. They would be able to give you more of an idea of that. But I just think it was a long strike for what the value was at the end. It wasn't really worth it, I don't think.

AD: Did it cause hardships? Do you want to talk a bit about that?

JM: I believe it probably caused hardships to a lot of the Union people, because when they went on strike their benefits were stopped, of course, so they wouldn't have any major medical or dental; and, you know, six months to keep up your payments for mortgages or car payments or whatever they might have had must have been hard on some people. Now a lot of them, where they had a spouse working, maybe they didn't notice the hardship as much as someone that didn't. There were a few where husband and wife were both in the Union and, of course, they were on strike, so that would have to have caused some hardship, I would think.

AD: Just as an aside, how many women were working at Suncor at the time?

JM: At the strike in 1986? Oh, goodness sakes, lots [laughter]. I don't know if I ever, ever did a survey of that because we had lots of women in the offices of course. And we had lots in the field that were equipment operators or trades people. We had lots of females. Well, compared to the workforce we might not say lots, but, as far as I was concerned, we had ... like, we had electricians, etc.

AD: When did that begin to happen, hiring women who were non-clerical?

JM: I think in the '80s, the mid '80s, maybe just before the strike. But you know we had more working in the mine to begin with, and then the trades people...

AD: Came later. So, in the mine they would have been equipment operators.

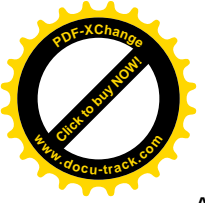
JM: They would have been equipment operators or belt walkers or labourers, you know, all sorts of jobs.

AD: Working shift work?

JM: Working shift work, like the men. And we had one gal that worked there from the office during the strike, and she said, "No, that's not for me." [Laughter] I didn't work up in the mine, but she had and she said, "No." So I admire those women. They kept right up with the men. And the ones in extraction, apparently they have great big valves to turn on and off. They did that too.



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AD: So what was the situation post the strike? The collective agreement was worked out, and ...

JM: You mean when everybody came back to work?

AD: Yes.

JM: Actually, I thought it was quite smooth. Now there might have been areas where there was some tension, but not that I was aware of. I was relieved to have them back, I can tell you that much, because then I didn't have to go down to LVF anymore. I think a lot of people were relieved to have them back. They were more knowledgeable in the different areas. We were just trainees. There was no way that we could ever do what they did. Now, some of the supervisors that had worked their way up and then took those positions, they were fine. But most of us were like a fish out of water, you know.

AD: The labour unrest and then the big fire happened. So tell me about the big fire.

JM: Oh goodness sakes, yes, the big fire. The extraction fire, you're talking about, yes. I think from what I heard there was probably more hardship then than I heard during the strike. I'm not saying there was more hardship during the strike, but when they had asked the employees, "Now we need you to work a 40-hour week, not a 42-hour week while we're rebuilding extraction," a lot of them were just ... they had hardship with that. They said, "Well, we're going to lose our houses. We're gonna ..." That's just an extra two hours a week, but I guess the more you have the more you spend. I guess that's how it works out with most people

AD: So do you remember the day of the fire?

JM: I don't. No, I don't remember. I was on holidays when the fire happened.

AD: So what month would it have been?

JM: Well, it would have been a summer month, because I was on vacation. So it would have been somewhere around there. It was a major, major fire.

AD: I've heard that the management considered even shutting down the plant. Were you aware of that?

JM: I wasn't aware of that for the fire. No, not at all. So that would be news to me.

AD: So then, this was a stumbling block, but then the plant did not shut down. Things continued. We then had the boom times, post 1993. Do you want to talk about that in terms of your area?



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JM: Well, prior to the boom time we went from, I do believe it was 1991, we went from bucket wheel to truck and shovel, and we had a lot of layoffs then, a lot of downsizing. I think 2- 300 people. Some took retirement; some were just layoffs, and that was a hard period, because a lot of your good friends—people you've worked 25 years with—were being laid off or given early retirement, or something like that, and they really didn't want to go. But, having said that, they weren't just hung out to dry; they were given severance or they were put on early retirement. It was just ... well, most of them didn't want to go at that time. They weren't ready to go.

AD: Can you talk about the severance package or retirement package?

JM: Well, the retirement package - they were given early retirement. If they were between the ages 50 to 54, we did what was called a "bridging." So we bridged them from age 50 to 55, when you would actually go on early retirement on the Suncor pension plan. And any of those that were 55 or older could just automatically retire. And the others were given severance, and it's a formula that they use that is approved by the courts.

AD: Do you remember what that was?

JM: No, I don't, because we had that formula set up on the computer program, and we'd put in the person's name ... It was based on your age, your years of service, and your salary.

AD: So the younger workers did suffer then.

JM: The younger workers that would be laid off, yes, definitely, because then they had to find employment somewhere.

AD: Did any of them requalify for the truck and shovel operation?

JM: Now are you talking Union or Staff, because the Union, I can't answer to that. You know, you can talk to one of the labour relations people. I think they did. But the Staff people, we did have some Staff people that went into other positions on the plant site and requalified for those positions. And any that we could we did do that, rather than lay them off or retire them. But I think it was two to 300 people that we downsized. And now it's bigger than ever.

AD: So you saw the company in terms of the human relations area from the beginning, from the startup through these ups and downs and into the boom times. Now, what was it like in the boom times, before your retirement?

JM: Well, in the boom times it was very, very busy. Of course, the bigger you get, the more you changed. We went into a new computer program. So they transferred me to Calgary to train on the new computer program for oil sands. It was like a three-year project but very interesting.



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I was always one who wanted to learn something new and different, anyhow. You were doing something, and I'd say, "How are you doing that?" or "How do you do it?" or "Why do you do it?" That's probably what got me into trouble with having more work and more work, but I would never want to sit with idle hands anyhow. I'm very, even today, I cannot sit and watch a TV program. I have to be doing something while I'm watching it.

AD: You talked about three women employees when you started. In terms of your own area, where you worked, what was your unit? What would the staffing be?

JM: You mean, when I first started?

AD: Later on, in the boom times.

JM: Oh, in the boom times, we had in Compensation and Benefits, there was one, two, three, four, five, six of us, seven of us. I'm not sure how many in Employment; quite a few in Employment, because they were doing the recruiting. And Labour Relations, they had five or six, and now it's triple that for all the departments, but then there's more employees, too. So I think as far as the ratio goes, it was probably equal. We were busy; we were really busy, but I don't think we'd have it any other way. Didn't want to sit there waiting for a customer to come in. And we were all fairly astute to the other positions. We could fill in for certain positions if we needed to. I probably picked a good department to be in, because I really enjoyed it.

AD: How many wives do you think, over the years, ended up working for Suncor, as well?

JM: There were quite a few, but there were also, like, a lot of the wives, if their husbands worked at Syncrude or Suncor or one of those places, they worked in town because, if they had kids, you were gone a good 10 hours a day, even on an eight-hour shift. So we didn't have a whole lot of husband and wife teams until maybe the kids were grown or whatever and then they, maybe both would go to work there. But as far as retirees go, like in the oil sands area, we have maybe 10, 12 couples that are retired. We did have quite a few wives. A lot of them worked part time, so they were only two or three days a week at the plant. But it's a long commute, and if you've got kids at home, you'd never see them, so most of them opted to work in town or something like that.

AD: So tell me what it was like over the years. Give me a sense of what it was like at Fort McMurray from when you arrived and the life in the community—what you did what others did and so on?



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JM: Well, when we arrived, it was like Siberia. I've never been to Siberia, but I've seen pictures. It was very cold. They had trailers set up on Birch Road, and it was virtually set up on muskeg. In the spring, our trailers would tip sideways, and they'd come and straighten them out again. And when we first moved into our trailer, you stepped up into steps to get into our trailer. And when we moved out of there, the steps were sunk. You didn't have to step up into anything [laughter]. But everybody looked out for everybody, so we were very close knit. If you had a party, everybody went to that party. There wasn't anybody you excluded. I think we had more fun then, before TV and everything, than after when people got a little more settled. You know, we had a lot of fun. We always had to tow somebody out, somewhere, because they were stuck. But not to say that I wasn't glad to see pavement!

AD: And when did that come?

JM: I think it came about 1974, somewhere around there.

AD: So you remember not only the building of Highway 63, but other road construction in the area.

JM: Mmm, mmm. Yes, I mean, Birch Road had, I don't know, three, 400 trailers. It was all muskeg. If you ever saw the road, there was just muskeg. And now it's just such a beautiful, beautiful subdivision. You would never know that it was just all mud. There was a special mud there, because it was like a mud and a clay. You know, if you had a size seven foot, by the time you got to your trailer, it was a size 12 foot. It just stuck on you.

AD: So, you really experienced that work camp, because in essence those trailers, that's what they were.

JM: Yes.

AD: And then the building of the permanent housing. Do you want to talk about the work of the Suncor Building Company?

JM: When they started with the housing, you picked a lot that you wanted. But they showed you these pictures. Architects pictures are so nice. So we picked a lot, and we go up there in the muskeg. And they've got the four pegs. Oh ya, this is a nice lot, but you really don't know if it is or not. But, by the time they built the house, the roads still weren't paved, but we had nice gravel roads. And then, of course, they paved the roads, so it was quite nice then. And we really thought we were living high [laughter]. We were; we were on a hill [laughter].



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AD: So, tell me a bit about water supply, power: all those things that we take for granted.

JM: Ya, we had water, and sewer, and power and gas. I don't know if we had gas right away. We might have had propane. I think we had propane to begin with, because I seem to remember a huge, gigantic propane tank. So our utilities ... I mean they'd go off quite often.

AD: Why?

JM: Who knows? They might have got caught in the muskeg, or somebody might have driven over a line, or something. But we had good utilities. We didn't have phones. We didn't have TV. And what I always noticed when we went into someone's home was in their living room there was a TV. And I used to say, "Why do you have the TV there? It doesn't even work." I guess they had the TV there wherever they came from.

AD: Anticipating.

JM: Our newspaper delivery was a day, maybe two days late, sometimes, even a week late. And gee, we didn't know Vanier died until about three months after his death. I remember that so well, because I said to somebody when we drove out to Edmonton, "Vanier died?" You know, we didn't even know that, but then the newspaper delivery got a little better. And then we got telephones.

AD: Which year was that?

JM: I don't remember. It had to be, I don't know, '68, '69. Then we got four hours of canned TV. And we made up a big thing of popcorn. We were going to sit down and watch this TV. It had three hours of "The Galloping Gourmet" and one hour of "The Beverley Hillbillies." [Laughter]

AD: So tell me a bit about shopping—food, clothing?

JM: We had ... what was that store called? Something like A and E foods, or something like that. And it wasn't too bad. You know, you didn't have a whole variety of stuff. A lot of us, when we went out to the city, we didn't make a specific trip to do that, because that would be more expensive. But, if you were going out to the city because you had a doctor's appointment, or something like that, then you brought back a truckload of groceries. Usually if you were going out, and people heard you were going out, then they all put in their orders. But we did have a Hudson's Bay store, which I really liked. And it was one of the old Hudson's Bay stores, you know, that had dog collars and hose, stuff like that up to clothes. But they eventually closed that. We did have one hardware store. I'm trying to think of the name. They were very good. It was just a couple, and they were wonderful people. They carried everything. Later on, we got a Macleod store. When the Bay closed, we got a Zeller's, but there was never any good shopping for women's clothes, or anything like that.



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They did have one woman's store quite some time ago, and actually it was very good, and then it closed down. Another one opened, but it was super, super expensive. Most people couldn't afford to shop there. And then, of course, they got a Wal-Mart and, then, a Staples. But I still maintain that for the size of Fort McMurray, they have no shopping. Still, today.

AD: So wives would make those shopping trips to Edmonton.

JM: Yes, we always did to buy stuff. You know you needed clothes for work, and you couldn't find them in Fort McMurray, I'm afraid. Even shoes; they had a shoe store there, but they didn't have much variety in shoes, or anything like that; so women's clothing period was just not a good selection.

AD: So what was like for a couple without children or a family?

JM: Like I said, in the early days ... we got to enjoy it. I think maybe, too, you learn to live with what you have. But still, we got to enjoy it and we were very close knit. And when we moved, we remained close knit, even with many of them that were still there, even though they moved into their homes, or what have you. So, we have a lot of marvelous, marvelous friendships that we accumulated from there.

AD: Outdoor activities?

JM: Outdoor activities were, well specifically if you were a hunter, there were lots. Hunting and fishing? Lots and lots. And for children, they did do a lot for children. They had figure skating; they had hockey; they had soccer; they had all sorts of things. It was a great place to raise small children, because there was lots to do. Even the women, we were on a ball team for years. When we started up, we'd lose 30 to nothing or something. But in the end, we were getting pretty good. We even got to the finals. I don't think there were as many activities for women, but they had a lot of craft things if women wanted involvement in it. I was never a crafty person, so I could never do any of that. But they had a lot to do. And there were a lot of church bazaars and stuff like that to go to. So, I think, you make things happen. And if you don't want to do any of it, then you just don't do it. But most people would participate. But if they didn't want to, I guess it would be boring.

AD: Can you tell me about the impact of shift work?

JM: I think shift work took a toll on a lot of things, specifically in the early years when they had what they called "the 28-day cycle." You couldn't go anywhere, and you couldn't do anything, because of seven days, seven nights, seven afternoons of work. I do think it took its toll on a lot of marriages, and maybe no more than it would in another situation, but being it was a small community you noticed it more.



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Maybe in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer, they had the same type of thing with shift work, but you didn't notice it as much, because you might not have known who your next door neighbour was.

AD: In terms of your immediate circle of friends, how many divorces were there that you think could be attributed either to the location, distances, shift work—those kinds of issues.

JM: Well, I think that, if there were divorces, that was the reason. I wouldn't be able to say how many. We have lots of friends that have been married for forty years, so I don't think I could put a number on it. But, there were quite a few. And there were quite a few people that I didn't know, but I, of course, knew them through work. They had their benefits, so they would be coming in to change their benefits, so there were quite a few, and specifically the shift workers. It didn't leave the day workers out, because of the location. A lot of them did not want to be living there. You could understand it of somebody who maybe came from a big suburb like Toronto and, then, moving to Fort McMurray, it must have been devastating. I would think. I came from a relatively small place, so it wasn't a problem.

AD: But even you were shocked?

JM: Oh, and it took adjusting, a lot of adjusting. I used to go to the Riviera Hotel, and by the time you got there your feet were about a size 12. I used to phone my mum collect and say, "Oh mum, you'd better come and get me. We're at the end of the world here, Mum." [Laughter] Because, I mean, it was really bad. But I do maintain, the location, the shift work, and stuff like that took a toll on a lot of marriages.

AD: Now, they changed the shift system slightly. Do you want to talk about that? When was that, and what did that involve?

JM: I don't remember when they changed it. Did my husband not know when they changed it?

AD: It's all right; I'll get it.

JM: I'm not sure when they changed it, but it was great, because they worked three nights, three days, six days off. They always got two weekends a month off. It was a seven day adjustment. When they first came in with it, when it was first introduced by our labour relations people, and I do believe it was the Union that probably introduced it to them, there was a lot of backlash. People would say, "Oh my goodness gracious, they're going to be gone 14 hours a day." I sort of had mixed feelings about it. I thought, well gee, I'm not sure. But that was the best thing they ever did was change those shifts. People had a lot more time off together. You could attend some of your kids' Christmas concerts and stuff like that, because some people went year and years and years before



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they had Christmas off, or Easter, or any of those types of dates. It was very hard. And it also came in where you could do shift mutuals - I'll work this shift for you, and you work one for me, sort of thing. So if you wanted to go to one of your kid's concerts or something like that, you could do it.

AD: So when was that implemented?

JM: Well, I think the mutuals were even when they had the 28-day cycle, but it was very difficult for someone to work a shift for you and you work it back, because you were working those awful shifts. You very rarely had the time off to go work somebody's shift. Whereas, with the new cycles, it was easy enough to do the mutuals; easier, to do the mutuals.

AD: Did you have any mentors, people that you worked closely with that you want to talk about?

JM: I did. I had some very good mentors. When I was first in compensation and benefits, Arthur Taylor was just my hero. He was very good; very patient, and very good at training. I learned so much from him, and, at the same time, Bill Loar, who was our—we didn't call him the EVP then—I forget. I'm trying to think of what we called them, but he was heading up the oil sands. He was excellent. He was just, just a really good, very helpful. Of course, very knowledgeable, or he wouldn't have been in the position he was in. And then along the way, I had...Chuck Knight was another good one, and Eric Engle, Linda Costello, Rudy Krueger: I had a lot of really good, very good bosses. They were all very helpful to me. Some were more rigid than others, but all good people. Well, we had one employer that called me "Mrs. Suncor," because I'm all for Suncor. But, they were very good to all of us, I thought. And we made a good living. We educated a lot of kids. I'm glad I'm not there now, because of the big boom, but I wish everybody else all the best there. And, of course, continued success, because we do have Suncor shares [laughter].

AD: Yes, would you say it was like working for a benevolent paternalistic company and that in essence it was a company town? Would that be fair to describe it like that?

JM: Some people would call it a company town, but there was also the city and the hospital; many contractors that worked at Suncor had businesses. I always used to call it a shift town, but not really a company town. Now Suncor, as well as Syncrude, did sponsor a lot of things. They sponsored building the bridge, and building the centre. What the heck is it called now? Downtown. You know, the big arena and everything—Macdonald Island. But, all of the companies were good at that, so I called it more a shift town than anything because everybody was on shift. I could never figure out why you would go to a small place like Peace River and their IGA was open 24 hours a day. And we didn't have one open 24 hours a day. And I used to think, it's all shift people here.



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AD: Do you think that ... I mean the leadership—the executives, the vice-presidents, the whatever their titles were—were parachuted in from the constituent companies. Did you feel that they were all equally successful in becoming involved and entrenched in the community before they were moved on?

JM: For the most part, I would say, "Yes." We did have, closer to when I was retiring, a lot of them that came in into positions, and they stayed in Calgary and they just commuted, and people used to comment. They used to say, "Well, what interest do they have in the community anyhow?" But, for the most part, while I was there, most of them did live there, and they were involved in the community. Bert Lang, for instance, was on the board of Keyano College for, oh my goodness gracious, a long time, long time. So, most of them did get involved in different things in the city.

AD: In terms of the political structure at the municipal level, Fort McMurray has chosen really not to become a city. I mean it has a reeve. Do you have any observations as to why and also the continuing infrastructure gap in comparison with other municipalities, like Grande Prairie, that most recently has manifested itself through the "death" highway, Highway 63. Do you want to talk a bit about that as a long-time resident?

JM: Well, I think the highway should have been twinned years ago. There's no such thing as rush hour. It's rush hour all the time. For whatever reason, they'll say, "It's the muskeg. It's the caribou crossing. It's the ..." And any highway person will tell you that's nothing to do with it. It's strictly political. And I believe that too, because you have two twinned highways to Grande Prairie, and we're only wanting one twinned highway. And there are a lot of bad drivers. I'm not saying that, but if you did a six-hour blitz, even on the Anthony Henday, and did it for six hours, you'd get more than 300 tickets. And, if you hit the QE2 that was two single lanes, you'd have a lot of accidents. I think you have to put it into perspective - what's driving our economy right now? And the country's economy, even, and make it more and more a priority. They had done a survey—you get the telephone surveys—and we never get surveyed, but we did. I said, "I don't care if it costs five billion, build it." They need it, they need it badly. We needed the twinned highway when I was there. You don't have a choice for driving that highway. If you have a specialist appointment—you know it takes months to get a specialist appointment—well, you have to go to that whether it's raining, snowing, whatever. They should have had more pull-offs for these wide loads. But people are quick to say, "It's the drivers." And I'm not saying they're good drivers. I'm saying they're no different than the drivers on the QE2 or the Grande Prairie highway or any of that.

AD: And in terms of the airfare, do you want to comment on that?



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JM: Well, the airfare of course is reduced quite a bit from when I was there. When I was there, you couldn't afford to fly out. You know, people used to say, "Well, take the plane." Well, ya, that's easy to say if you can afford it. It's much cheaper to drive. Now, with WestJet, they're competing with each other, and you can now get better rates. Still not as good as they should be. But you can get better rates. But for the amount of taxes...one of the fellas that was just here the other day said he thought that all the employees at the oil sands should stop paying federal and provincial tax for a week. And he said, "Then they can twin the highway." And he's probably right.

AD: So there's a real infrastructure gap.

JM: It is, and it's political. I hope our Premier has seen the light and is going to do it. And apparently, she drove up. We've had past Transportation ministers, when we wanted the highway paved, he flew up. We said, "Well, why didn't you drive up. You have to drive up here so you can see what the road's like." So, the one thing I will say is that she did drive up. I would like to pick the time for her to go, like when it's just getting winter. Go up on a Friday evening, try to find a place to stay for the weekend, and then drive back on Sunday evening, and then you'll really see what it's like. I don't care what it costs, twin it.

AD: In terms of your own working life, you basically spent virtually all of it working for one company, and in a resource sector and in more or less a boom time. Do you want to talk a bit about that? Your perceptions about that.

JM: Well first off, I really liked my job, and I think that makes a big difference. Nobody works for nothing; they're all working for the pay, of course. But I think, first and foremost, you have to like your job, because if you don't you can't look forward to getting up in the morning. I always liked my job and I got paid well for it, so that's one of the reasons that I was there as long as I was. I didn't have any major issue, you know, somebody not treating me fair or anything like that. I was very, very fortunate that way, so that's the reason. Had I not liked my job, I'd have probably applied for a different job somewhere.

AD: Job satisfaction even with those hardships that we've talked about?

JM: I think that's the number one thing for a job. I think you have to have job satisfaction, because if you don't it must be very difficult. I don't care how much it pays. If you go to work everyday and say, "Well, I'm doing it for the pay," well we're all working for income, but if you don't go to work because you like it, it's going to be a very long day.

AD: Today, the media presents the oils sands in a very negative way, and international environmental groups are pushing that. What's your sense, having worked in the industry for as long as you did, of the issues around the environment, plant safety, those kinds of things? Because you would have been aware of it. You lived it. Do you want to comment on that?



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JM: Well, my biggest issue is the companies didn't fight back soon enough. There's always been the issues of our pollution or whatever—years ago—and now it's mushroomed up into something big. I mean we actually emit one tenth of 1 percent of the world's [carbon] emissions. We have more emission controls than most companies do. We have more emissions [controls] in place than the U.S. does. And the Athabasca River is lined with tar sand.

AD: So you feel that there are regulations and that the company has honoured those?

JM: Yes, and they're getting better all the time. They're getting better with new technology. If you saw the tailings pond that they've refurbished, it's beautiful. It's much nicer than it was before it was a tailings pond. I think that they try very, very hard to have environmentally safe conditions, and I think they've come a long way with it. And, as far as safety goes, they have top-notch safety. We have very good safety people: safety trainers. They've always been very good. And, again, the more technology you have, the better the safety; the better the operation; the better barrels per year. I always thought we had good safety programs in place.

AD: You mentioned the muskeg, but you also mentioned that the oil sands naturally exist and you can see them at the riverbank level. Tell me what it's like living on top of these enormous bituminous sands deposits?

JM: I never had a problem with it. My biggest issue was people complaining about any of it when, I mean, you can go swim in the Athabasca and you'll come out black as black can be. It's not because of spillage. It's the river banks that are lined - the oils sands goes from north of Fort McMurray to south of Wandering River. I mean you're going to find that oil sands everywhere.

AD: It's naturally occurring.

JM: Ya. Now, their methods for extracting it are getting better and better all the time. I think they do a marvellous job—all of the companies that are up there now with their emission controls...

AD: Their controls.

JM: Ya, their controls. They're on top of it more than most provinces or countries. That's one of their major issues.

AD: Are there any summative remarks that you want to make in terms of your career and your time up there.

JM: Not really. Like I said, I enjoyed my job. I enjoyed my time in Fort McMurray. I am very glad I'm not there now, because it is very boomie, very, very boomie. And it's just not my cup of tea any more.



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AD: Let's compare, I mean, what was the work force like, the numbers, in 1991, and then maybe in 2000? Give me a sense of the unionized positions and the staff positions, to demonstrate this growth.

JM: Gee, I did get the union figures—I have some there—they went from something like 900 to over 3,000 now.

AD: That's the unionized workforce?

JM: Right. The Staff ... I don't even know how to think about that, because they've just grown so much. Now, of course, with the merger with Petrocan. I mean, it's phenomenal. But I mean that goes right across the country. For in Fort McMurray, I don't know what the Staff would be today.

AD: We've seen the actual plant operators increase dramatically, and, in terms of the Staff that are sort of supervisory, regulatory, and clerical, one would expect that it would ...

JM: Absolutely, absolutely. Now, a lot of those positions, you take in the engineering and the accounting and the purchasing, they've all been relocated to Calgary, because they don't have to be on site. And then we built a big office at the bottom of Confederation Way, so a lot of our other Staff are there. You get out at the plant site more your shift supervisors and your managers for the mine extraction, upgrading, utilities. Those areas that have to be there on site.

AD: So that's a policy shift, isn't it?

JM: Yes.

AD: Deciding that the entire labour force in the admin area doesn't have to be on site.

JM: That's right.

AD: Why Calgary rather than Edmonton?

JM: Well, that's where our head office is, is Calgary. Now we do have offices in Sherwood Park. And we have pipeline in Sherwood Park. And now, of course, we have the refinery in Sherwood Park. But the majority of your employees are ... Now, when I started, the Calgary office had maybe 30, 40 people there. And now they have something like 20 floors.

AD: Wow.

JM: They found that a lot of those positions don't need to be in Fort McMurray.

AD: Going back to the Petrocan, the Rick George era, there were redundancies as they merges the two.





JM: Yes, there were.

AD: Do you have any sense of what that might have been like?

JM: No, I don't have any idea. When I was there, when that would have happened, there would have been a lot of duplicate jobs. So there would have been a lot, and I'd assume they did the same as when we did the downsizing. They might have taken early retirement. They might have taken different positions with the company, or they might have just taken a severance and left. And that would probably be what they would do. But I would think that they would have a lot of duplicate positions because Petrocan was a fairly big company as well. So I'm sure there would be almost identical positions in a lot of them.

AD: Now, you mentioned the closeness and the friendships, that shift workers saw most of their shift colleagues both on the job and to socialize. And this has continued into retirement, and I gather that you're involved with ...

JM: Yes, we have the Edmonton Oil Sands Pioneers Club... so 5 percent of them are oil sands. We also have the pipeline people. We also have Petrocan now, so we have something like 509 members. While it's a social club, we also help. If you're having problems with your benefits, we know who to talk to or what to do about it. We help them that way, and they're very close knit. When TransAlta took the power plant, most of them were Suncor employees so you didn't have much of a problem there. But with Petrocan, I had no idea what to look forward to there, but we had I think 60 Petrocan members. And we're one of the few clubs that do this. Calgary doesn't have any. I don't know how many they have in the Toronto area. And Fort McMurray doesn't have any. I was very happy. They're very nice people. They fit in good.

AD: So I gather you're on the executive.

JM: I'm the membership secretary, because I know them all [laughter]. But, yes, we're a very good group and we all get along very well.

AD: So, how frequently would you meet at events, and how many events a year?

JM: Well, events a year, we have probably six to eight events. We have our AGM. During the summer, we have two or three golf tournaments and a barbecue. Sometimes, we take the River cruise. In the fall, we have the Chinese dinner. And we have the Mayfield Inn, and then we have a Christmas party. Lots of good volunteers. It's easier to get good volunteers from them than when I was working, because they're happy to do it.

AD: When you were working, you were recruiting volunteers to do what?



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JM: For instance, when we had the barbecue or the golf tournament, and you needed people to help set up, whatever they do. I'm not a golfer. But I set up the tournament.

AD: So did you do these kinds of activities up in Fort McMurray?

JM: With the company, we had 10-year dinners, and they got so big that they started having the 25-year dinners instead. And, yes, I was always in the 10-year dinners, the 25-year dinners. It was a lot of fun.

AD: So did you have any responsibility for organizing those?

JM: All of them.

AD: So that was a part of your job?

JM: Yes.

AD: So when did the company start introducing those kinds of ... I guess they're teambuilding activities, aren't they really? And recognition?

JM: Ya, recognition more than anything, but oh my goodness gracious. The 10-year dinners have been going on, well, since I was there 10 years.

AD: Do you remember the first one?

JM: I remember the first Christmas party that we had. It was in the Riviera Hotel. We had two rooms, and there were 60 people there. I remember that. I don't remember what year it was [laughter]. It must have been '67 or '68 or '69, somewhere around there. Maybe 1970.

AD: So that a part of your job description involved those kinds of activities.

JM: Right, the 10-year dinners at that time. And then when they dropped the 10-year dinners and went on to the 25-year dinners, then yup, that was my responsibility. It was a lot of work, but we always had a good time at them. It was very, very well received. It was good. Good camaraderie, and that's where you knew all of them. The Union people, the Staff people, management—it didn't matter. And now with the retiree club, I had no idea it would grow as big as it has. But there you go. It has.

AD: With the boom, in terms of further and further developments, it's going to grow even more.



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JM: Oh absolutely it is. And you know, we don't have to recruit them. They phone and say they want to join the club. I mean, when they retire we have a little paper that goes in their retirement package, and they make that decision. And when one of them does call me, depending on where they live, I'll say, "You're closer to Calgary, would you like to join their club?" They respond, "No, I don't know anybody there." Or, "Ya, I would." So we give them the option of all the clubs. It's not that you must join this one. Hopefully, they'll join one of them.

AD: Is there one in Newfoundland?

JM: No, there isn't, but we will subsidize if you have a party there. And we always have a group that has a party on the Rock.

AD: Are you a registered society in Alberta?

JM: Yes, we are. We're a registered society. And if they have five or more members that want to get together, we subsidize them. These guys have it every year. They have a great time. They send us pictures. They know how to party. They really do [laughter].

AD: So is that a characteristic ...?

JM: I enjoyed their parties. I've been to lots of them, and I enjoyed them [laughter]. And we have some on the Island that get together, and some in central B.C.—the Kelowna area. They have their parties and we subsidize those.

AD: Do you remember any more exotic workers that came from further afield? The U.S., Europe, whatever ...

JM: We, of course, had them from all over the world, coming to work for us. And now, in Fort McMurray, there's lots from Venezuela and places like that. We didn't have as many from there as they do [now], but we had some from Pakistan and England. Well, Arthur Taylor was my first mentor, and he was very, very British [laughter].

AD: So would they have been in middle management positions or the admin side or engineering?

JM: Well, they could be in top management, too. We had lots in top management, too. And Steve Williams—our current CEO—I do believe is from England. So, ya, we have them from everywhere.

AD: In terms of putting on your thinking cap and looking ahead, where do you see the industry going in the next 25 years?



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JM: It's really hard to say, because I think they're going to do nothing but good. The way they're going now, presently, I would say the sky's the limit for them. People will say they're better to buy Suncor shares than even Imperial Oil or any of the other ones. I hope they're right [laughter].

AD: In terms of being an employee, do you get an opportunity to buy shares in the company?

JM: Oh ya, through the savings plan you could redirect so much money to buying shares. And actually when they went public ... now, was that about 1991, I think, you could buy so many shares at \$19.50. So that's what we did. Most of the employees did. There were a few that probably didn't. And then through the savings plan, you could buy shares as well. And then the employee long-term incentive plan was shares. If you were there from a certain period to a certain period—I think it was 250 shares we got apiece. And they were going to actually split, just before we were going to give them the shares, so they got 500 each. They still have plans like that. I wouldn't know what the other ones are right now. ELTIP was the last one that I did, and that was the Employee Long Term Incentive Plan. Ya, you have all sorts of options to buy shares, if you want to.

AD: We've talked about the few strikes leading up to 1986, has there been any labour issue since that period?

JM: You know, I don't know. I haven't heard of any. I communicate periodically with the head of the Union, because I knew him from before he was the head of the Union, and we get along quite well. I'll get the odd e-mail: "How are you doing?" or something like that. I don't know. A labour person would probably have to tell you that. There could be. I don't know. I've not heard of any rumblings.

AD: But it seems that after the strike that real effort was made on both sides to implement the new collective agreement. The company appears to be very proactive in terms of these incentives. Would that be your understanding?

JM: Mmm, yes. And I understand, too, that there's bonuses if you hire on. And I'm not familiar with how they work. I do know that Union members get the bonus just as well as Staff members and it's probably a formula that they use right now, but I could be wrong.

AD: Any summative remarks that you want to make? Any stories that come to mind? Have I asked you the right questions?

JM: I don't think so; I think you covered just about everything [laughter].

AD: Thanks so much for agreeing to be interviewed. As you know, this material is going into the Glenbow Archives for future researchers to join the conventional oil histories there.



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JM: Well, thanks for asking me. I've really enjoyed it. I think my husband enjoyed it too.

AD: Well, thanks so much for sharing your knowledge and experience.

JM: Okay; thank you.



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