
GERMAIN ROUTHIER

Date and place of birth (if available): Dec. 24, 1927 St. Paul, AB

Date and place of interview: Discovery Centre, Fort McMurray

Name of interviewer: Peter McKenzie-Brown

Name of videographer:

Full names (spelled out) of all others present: N/A

Consent form signed: Yes

Initials of Interviewer: PMB

Last name of subject: ROUTHIER

PMB: I'm talking to Germain Routhier. We're in Fort McMurray in the Oil Sands Discovery Centre. And today is the 22nd of March, 2012. And we're a little bit late getting started but I think everything's going to work out just fine.

Germain, you were recommended to us by Bert McKay because I think he's the key guy in your oil sands pioneers group. I'd like you to begin first of all by telling me about your background in a... First of all, as an Alberta Francophone, where did you come from? What was that like? Maybe tell me even where you met your wife Marie. So you're personal history a little bit and then your career. And then we're going to get into some other things which will be interesting.

ROUTHIER: Okay, I was born in St. Paul, Alberta. Family of nine children, four in the first family, and five in the second.

PMB: What year was that?

ROUTHIER: 1927. We were two girls and two boys in the family, but the first girl died as an infant. My father died when I was maybe three years old, so I don't really remember him. Then my mother a couple years later married my uncle, which was my dad's brother. And between them they had two boys and three girls. But he raised us as his own. We were just the one family. But as the years went by I started school in St. Paul. I went up to Grade 3 in French and English. And then the family decided to move to Lac La Biche. Around St. Paul we were making, from what I can recall, a half decent living. Nobody was rich but there was always food on the table. But when we moved to Lac La Biche and we ended up north of Lac La Biche at a place they call Square Lake. It was fall in the year, we had no house. Things were pretty tough.



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PMB: Was this during the Depression?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, right at the Depression time. And I can remember us going fishing on what they call Square Lake and getting fish so we could have something to eat. And most of that winter is what we lived on, and maybe the odd wild animal that someone would kill and we'd have a little bit of meat. There was no vegetable, there were no potatoes. My Stepfather would cut a little firewood through the night, haul it to Lac La Biche which would take a whole day with a team of horses and get three dollars. From that he would buy maybe a little bit of flour, a little bit of sugar. We'd go to school with lard in our bread and a little bit of sugar spread on the lard because that's all they had to feed us. Clothing came from, at that time they used to call it relief. We'd get a couple pairs of socks and a jacket and maybe a pair of pants. And that's what we had to wear to school where we walked for three miles in the cold winter months.

PMB: Had your stepfather moved there in order to farm or...?

ROUTHIER: No, through some friends of his from St. Paul that came to here earlier and supposedly the gold grew on the trees. So he decided to move with his friend. But it was all just really sad. But from there he moved on a little further north then there was no school for about two years. And finally one couple met him in Lac La Biche and they came to visit us and they were both school teachers and they arranged it and we start to get correspondence from the Board of Education. And between my sister and myself when we were about Grade 2 or 3, tried to work out and my brother and sisters to help them out. And that was like this for a couple of years and then we moved again, a little closer to Lac La Biche. So him and some other people got together, built a school and they got this person to come and teach school. And Mr. Paulowich was our teacher. Like three years ago I went by the graveyard, and I stopped and looked at it. And there he was. That's where he was buried. Right next to where we used to live.

So I went to school until Grade 8. That one winter when my mom got sick and trapping fur for a living was the mode them days, there was no work. So I stayed home to trap and keep the animals alive while he was sick. So in the spring he wanted me to go back to school, but I was so far behind in my grade I say "No, I'm not going back." So I stayed at Grade 8 that was my education that I had. We stayed there a few years and finally my mother's cousin came and visited me and he was going to Edmonton to work for farmers and I went with him, I was 16 years old. So we went. And that was an experience of its own, first time leaving home, didn't know nobody. And we ended up at a place called Bon Accord, which is north of Edmonton. And I can't find work, he found work by immediately as he was in his early twenties, but I could not find no work. Until I went and told him I had enough money left to take a train home so the next day I would be leaving. And the man at that house offered me dinner and he said, "Just a minute maybe I get you a job." He phoned his nephew which was a Mr. Rigney, and he came and met me, hired me and I worked with him the whole summer.

PMB: Well what did you do?



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ROUTHIER: Farming, feeding pigs, feeding cows, making calves, doing farm work, picking roots. It was all farm work. But he was a very clever man. His mother was a cook; his dad was a government person. And I really enjoyed that summer with him. He taught me how to drive a tractor. He taught me how to drive a truck. So I grew up that one year. he wanted me to stay for the winter, but I decided to go home.

PMB: So by this time you would probably have been about 17 or 18?

ROUTHIER: That's right, yeah, but I was lonesome and wanted to come home. So we came home. And then from thereon most of my work was in lumber camps, cutting logs. There was no power saws. It was all done by hand. It was a lot of hard work and not too much money, but you'd always make enough to get to town and have a few beers and meet the boys and then back to the bush we'd go. And this went on and on for a number of years until one day I met this person and he offered me, he trained me how to run a caterpillar tractor and clear land for farmers. Well that was a little bit of a nervous thing, but I took it, he taught me how to run it and I worked for them for about five years driving heavy equipment. Then the company kind of went broke. So then I worked for different little job, mostly dirt moving equipment type of stuff.

PMB: But you had experience in heavy equipment now.

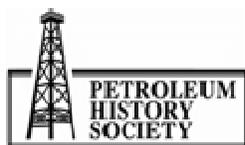
ROUTHIER: Yeah. And Mr. Hamilton in Lac La Biche hired me to work for him. He sent me with a little caterpillar along the railroad track between here Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche to the where we building the railroad for the future oil sands that was carry heavy load. So they had to rebuild. And my job was to work there with, there were two draglines and a Cat and we'd move dirt and it filled the... lift the track. All kinds of construction work on the railroad for two and a half years. Then I got promoted to a bigger machine with Hamilton and we did a lot of oil field work on open leases and stuff with the oil companies. And I think it was December of '66, the beginning of December '66 that my brother told me they were interviewing people to come and work in Fort McMurray. So I went and had an interview, got hired on for the 3rd of January to come start here at GCOS which is Suncor today on the 3rd of January, 1967. And I guess from there, well a...

PMB: So you literally started at the very beginning of the year, the day after New Years' Day.

ROUTHIER: That's right. Just prior to that in 1952 I guess I should've gone back, that's when I met my wife. We got married in 1954.

PMB: And her name is Marie?

ROUTHIER: Marie Boulanger. She was a girl from around Lac La Biche. When we moved like right on... Well I came to work on the 3rd of January. The deal was with the company then that we'd work for three months, if we were satisfied with the company we had a job. If they were not satisfied with our performance they would let us go, no questions asked. So I really wanted the job, I mean we really worked quite hard and I got told that I had the job. Then it was a matter of getting a house, move the family and all that. So the company were giving us homes, three bedroom homes,



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with no money down and we start paying \$155.00 a month payments. The house was worth \$16,800.00. So we got all that put together and on the 31st of March, 1967 is when I moved my family. Settled in Fort McMurray, from thereon it was work, work, work.

PMB: So the work that you would've been doing when you started was sort of finishing off with the construction at the Suncor plant?

ROUTHIER: Well it was mostly overburden, we were moving the dirt.

PMB: From the mine.

ROUTHIER: From the mine to get to the oil sands. They have 75 tonne truck and I was hired to drive one of them trucks. But it was shift work, was two shifts.

PMB: Seventy-five tonne must probably have seemed huge in those days.

ROUTHIER: When I sat in that seat I got scared, when I looked down there's about 15 feet to the ground. Today it would be a toy compared to what they have. Anyway, I did that for a while and then my supervisor asked me if I'd like to maybe try to run something else. I say, "I know to run front-end loaders. I know how to run graders. I know how to run a Caterpillar." So he gave me the choice, I went front-end loader which I really enjoyed. Did that and a little bit of grader work and this went on for I think a year and a few months. And one day my neighbor came up to me and says, "Would I like to transfer to extraction, they needed some people."

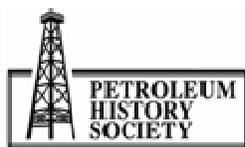
PMB: Okay, so at first you were working in mining.

ROUTHIER: The mining, yeah.

PMB: And now you were being asked to move to extraction?

ROUTHIER: Yeah. Well, I didn't know what to do so I talked to one of the old hands in the mine. And he was an older man and he told me, he says, "You know, you better grab that." He says, "Look at me." He says, "I'm in my 60s now." And he says, "Because I never took that chance I'm still at the same level I was when I started, something in mine." So I took his advice, which I could've kicked him many times for taking a job in extraction. But anyway, we went in there and when I looked at all these pipes and pumps it was a nightmare. I didn't have a clue what was going on. I did it and the tar sand was coming in, and you would mix it, it was separate and the third amount we did like a final extraction and the rest would go to the tailings pond. But little by little, it might've taken me it would be six months. Keep trying and trying and reading and trying. Then I started getting the clues that what it was doing, and little by little I became an operator. Then I would start as a trainee first.

As an operator, I needed to start checking pumps and making sure there is oil in them and they're not heating up and all this kind of work. And the more interesting it was, and I did that for a couple



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of... three years. Then again moved up to Operator A, and little by little a few years later to Senior Operator and then into the board, learn to run the board. And once you're at the board, you were running the plant. You had to make oil. At first it was a little bit scary but I had a good guy training me and I caught on to that. And I think I did that for about a year and a half then went in at a Unit Leader.

PMB: So right now, we're at about 1972.

ROUTHIER: In that neighborhood, yeah. So then I went as a Unit Leader and did that for two or three years. Which I really enjoyed because you would work with the guys, you were able to get out there hands-on. They needed a hand and you out there do it with them, always got a long real good with the guys. And eight years, I retired in '86? About 1986.

ROUTHIER: Nineteen...? I'm trying to think...

PMB: Try 1986

ROUTHIER: Anyway, I was offered the supervisor's job, which entitled me by making more money would be a bigger pension when I'd retire. When I took that, I thought I'd made the right move. But there was times when things were not going very good and the pressure was very, very high. Above me, the area supervisors and superintendents was always on our case to get more production. And to put more production you have to push the guys and the guys don't like to be pushed. It was them days when lazy was coming along.

PMB: When we started speaking before this interview, you said you were around during the strike as a supervisor. And that strike was in or around '84 - '85.

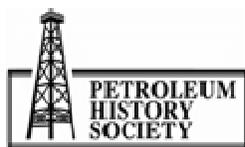
ROUTHIER: Okay.

PMB: So you must've not retired until after '85?

ROUTHIER: It was '86 when I retired. Just the beginning of '86.

PMB: Oh, okay.

ROUTHIER: But all in all, and it kept on until then the strike came on. And of course I was to retire because of the strike coming; they asked me to stay on. Again, that kind of changed again because what we had to do was take some of the office, bring them in there and teach them how to run the plant. Would you believe, it worked really good. A lot of people doesn't believe that but these people took a lot of interest in learning this, and with our help we were not supervisors anymore we were in there, hands-on and helping them to do what had to be done. And we kept making oil even though the strike was on, we kept making oil. Which really felt good and even today I've got letters signed by some of my officials the good job I did by pulling through the strike.



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PMB: Let's hold on the discussion of the strike, because I want to get talking about that specifically later on. A part from that, would you like to talk about your career sort of start with that?

ROUTHIER: From thereafter I retired. One person called me and says, "Would I like a little job?" Well I was too young, I just couldn't sit. So he offered me to go about, be a contractor and go out and take natural gas reading of the companies using the gas. Like then it was Suncor, Syncrude to the south here. So my job... he did give six hours at \$35.00 an hour, I used my own vehicle.

PMB: Per week?

ROUTHIER: Per trip, there was one trip a week.

PMB: Per trip, okay.

ROUTHIER: So I went on a dry run before accepting it and it would take me three hours to do it with lots of time. So then it was \$70.00 an hour; so I did that for four and a half years.

PMB: And of course in 1987/88 that was a lot of money.

ROUTHIER: That's right this was good money, yeah?

PMB: Yeah.

ROUTHIER: I paid for a brand new truck with this part time job. And I enjoyed all that and by the time they didn't need me to do this anymore, I was ready to give it up that was enough. Then during that same period of time I started getting involved with the seniors in Fort McMurray. And we did a lot of stuff for the seniors. And that during that time I became president and...

PMB: So when you retired, the way I calculate it you would only have been about 59 maybe.

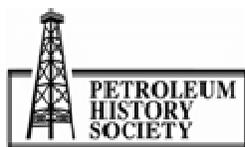
ROUTHIER: No I was...

PMB: If you're born in '27 and you retired in '87.

ROUTHIER: Eighty-six, yeah. Yeah, I was...

PMB: Yeah, so you were about 59.

ROUTHIER: That's right, yeah, yeah. So I do know this kept me going and then we got together with the seniors and we got with the government and the municipality; a lot of really good experience. Something I never dreamed that I could get into. I was asked by our MLA, Guy Boutillier at the time if I would consider going on the Senior Advisory Council in Edmonton to work towards doing better things for the seniors. We'd be having meetings in different parts of the Province; they would pay for us to go to the meetings, our mileage and whatnot. So I did that for



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three years, I enjoyed that as well. But then travelling from here to Edmonton by car and that; and when I had a really close call to getting killed, I get a little nervous. So, I said, “No, that’s good enough.”

PMB: The highway was still pretty rugged then wasn’t it?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. But in the meantime, while this was going we started raising money to build the seniors’ new activity center. And then to me that is how... you call, there’s a word for it. That you know I did something for the community that will stay there forever, right.

PMB: That’s a great achievement.

ROUTHIER: Yeah. The day were standing in the building, it’s a beautiful building. I stayed president for five years.

PMB: And you were president of this, what was it called, The Fort McMurray Golden Years Society.

ROUTHIER: Yeah. And plus, in the meantime Burt MacKay had started this club of Pioneer Club through Suncor. So he was the president at first but then he didn’t want that anymore, so I took president and was that for four or five years. That there is where the company allows X amount of dollars per head, plus your partner your wife. And from that way, he made different functions: picnics, or dances, or Christmas Dinner, or whatever. And that’s been going on but I think three years ago, I finally passed that on to somebody else. I had had enough. Because, you now, I’m going to be 85 years old next birthday so it’s time to take it easy, sit back and enjoy life. And I’m married to a very good little woman she looks after me like...

PMB: She looks after your email.

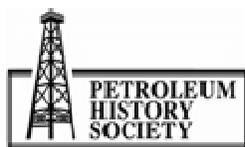
ROUTHIER: Yeah, she’s my driver. She’s my cook, housekeeper. So, we’ve had a good life.

PMB: I hope she’s also your friend?

ROUTHIER: Oh she is definitely. It was her birthday today in fact. In the meantime, at one time I sat down and I figured the hours of the Routhiers at Suncor, my boys all four of them work there and some grandsons. And we had a 100, if I remember at a 114 years of work between us and since then there’s still three grandsons out there. That’s at least five or six years ago, which would mean that many more years of work at Suncor. So, I think that’s really...

PMB: And they all work at Suncor.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah. So I think that’s a big deal. And we have seven children, we have 19 grandchildren, and now we’ve got 13 great-grandchildren. So we’ve got a real nice family; very lucky, no sickness, no health problems. As I said before, what can I say, it’s been good. The company, the company’s been so good to us. When I retired, I will not give you the amount of money they offered



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me because I'd like to keep that... I can tell you when it's not recorded. We bought a new car and made a trip to St. John, Newfoundland. That was...

PMB: That was your holiday, huh?

ROUTHIER: Yeah. And as far as Suncor, what can I say is good to me and my company in every way possible.

PMB: That's the summary of your career, that's fantastic. Now I'd like to ask you some very specific questions. First of all, can you tell me exactly how mining, so we can all understand, how did the extraction process in those days work at Suncor?

ROUTHIER: That was one of the big problems. I guess when we talk about Mr. Big Man.

PMB: J. Howard Pew?

ROUTHIER: McClements, McClements.

PMB: Oh, Bob McClements, okay.

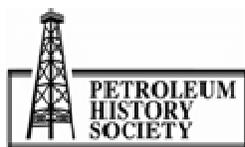
ROUTHIER: One time he had come to the mine and got me off my loader to talk to me. And he says, "How's it going?" Oh good. But he says, "No, we've got a problem." There were layers of rocks in between the tar sand. Like there could be overburden, tar sands, eight or ten feet of rocks, then tar sand underneath. They're only way of getting that, they had to put it through. They'd take every rock that was possible, there were always some rocks that would get in the tar sand and ended up being extraction which was all conveyers that would bring it into extraction. And then when that would go through the feeders and feed the belts, to feed into the drums to mix the stuff then big rock would jam somewhere and there we were. So we had to take these big jackhammers...

PMB: And the whole system would shut down?

ROUTHIER: Yeah. Jackhammers and break the rocks to the point where we could lift them and throw them out.

PMB: Now at this point when this happening you were still in mining?

ROUTHIER: Oh yes, yes. And then when I went to extraction I used jack hammer many, many hours. There was time we had to... In extraction, we had four lines. Four lines with each line could move three thousand tonnes an hour. But there were times when we might have one line running and the others were all jammed with something. There were so many problems. Many, many times I wondered how can this company keep going? After you getting into a layer of tar sand, there was no oil. So all you'd get is a scum of brown stuff and separation cells. You go for 12 hours and a few barrels of oil, just mucky oil. It wasn't even oil. But with time, when Syncrude brought in, that is



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with the bucket-wheels that they used to use and this is why they could not separate it. Because the bucket-wheel would cut whatever was in front of it, and if there was rocks there was rocks.

But when Syncrude started a new method of using trucks or dragline, anything that was no good went to the side, anything that was good went to extraction. And when Suncor was finally able to see that and get rid of the bucket-wheels and they bought the big trucks, and the draglines and they started doing the same thing. They start making oil. Because all the garbage stuff never went to extraction, it was a dump area to dump that and that's where it would stay. And all the good stuff would... and from that day on they start making oil.

PMB: That is the clearest explanation of that problem I've ever heard.

ROUTHIER: Okay, I'm glad you hear that.

PMB: That's excellent.

ROUTHIER: At the same time I sent them a letter, oh I should've brought that for you. Where in 12 hours my crew I was supervising we had made one hundred and twenty-five thousand barrels in 12 hours. That was a record breaker. Today three hundred thousand is little it's got to be four, four and a half and five. But that's all... I went there, they gave me a tour and it's altogether a different extraction. There are no more big drums; that all this is done now in the pipes. When it's swirling in the pipes, some of it goes to settling pond and they get the oil and it's... It's like day and night, it's like day and night.

PMB: It's a total different technology. Now I thought I heard you say that what Syncrude first did was to use the dragline and trucks, but then eventually they moved to the shovels. The automatic shovels.

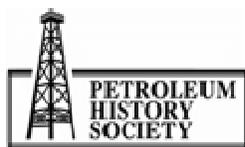
ROUTHIER: But I said, at one time what they would do they had big draglines and they would dig the tar sand and whatever was good they'd go on a big windmill and then they had this kind of bucket-wheel that would come then and just pick up the good stuff and put it through. The perfect stuff would go away. And then with time these bucket-wheels started wearing out and that's when somebody came up with the big trucks and the big shovels.

PMB: The shovels...

ROUTHIER: And they started making money and then Suncor followed suit.

PMB: Well it made a huge difference. Now, Suncor was the first plant of course. Do you feel though that after Syncrude went on stream that Suncor was constantly following Syncrude?

ROUTHIER: Oh yes, oh yes. There was... because even Syncrude came to us and we were told to take them around the area and show them the problems we had. Like in extraction, especially where I was.



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PMB: This is before it was built, or after it was all...?

ROUTHIER: Yeah. No, when Syncrude decided to build. And I remember they came into extraction and I went with the guys and I showed them a certain area where it would pile up with tar sand and the only way you could do clean-up was with hoses and you wash it down. Now he says, "Is there any other problem, any way that you can have a more open floor, hat you come in with these little Bobcats and clean it. You could save labour and time like you never believe." And they give me a tour of Syncrude after it was running. And I saw the... I'd explained them how to do it, it was there.

PMB: Isn't that something.

ROUTHIER: Kind of makes you feel you good, yeah.

PMB: That's a really interesting story. Okay now, I've a bunch of more specific questions, this has been really interesting so far. First of all, do you have anything else on how things changed during the time? You've given a pretty good view of it.

ROUTHIER: There have been many, many changes. One change I think right now is when the company was a little bit smaller; we had a barbeque every summer.

PMB: And you all knew each other?

ROUTHIER: And we all went to the picnic and we all had a good time. And it was supplied by the company and with time that kind of died out. And then they started a BBQ, in a building mostly at McDonald Island. We would go and have a big BBQ and meet all the old timers, some that had gone away were back for the BBQ and we'd all meet. And this went on and on until about three years ago.

PMB: Now you're talking about the seniors?

ROUTHIER: No, all employees and retirees. It would go on for a whole week so that every shift would have a chance to come. But now I think after they join in with Petro-Canada it got so big that they dissolved that. Now... what they have now is a family day. Last year we were... us seniors, or Pioneers we were specially, on a special bus for us that drove us over there. It's a beautiful... lunch, so hamburgers, hot dogs, all kinds of trimming. And the tour of the plant, they gave us a real beautiful tour and one of the tours that really I was impressed with was our old pond number one. Where all the garbage for years had went into pond. And little by little it closed in and they drain it out...

PMB: And dried it up, yeah.

ROUTHIER: ...and filled it, dried it right up and we were able to drive on it with the bus, like unbelievable. To me that was the greatest thing that they were able to show.



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PMB: So this was an old tailings pond?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, and now the trees are growing out of it.

PMB: There was a first one that was really kind of dried up like a... it isn't technically recovered yet.

ROUTHIER: Well the one is... but there's a second one they're working that's not quite yet. But now there are even trees growing, they're planting trees and it's growing.

PMB: Wow.

ROUTHIER: And then when we're building the dyke for this pond, it was right along the river. And after it was built so high they start planting trees, and grass and would you believe you can go there today and you see little trees that are least 10-12 feet high. You'll see about some that are 12-15 feet high, all kinds of grass. So they can grow stuff on the tailings sands with a little bit of mixture... Is what they do is they save all the muskeg and all that blended dirt and they put that into a machine that would blow it and then the seed goes with that and with the rain it will grow, so yeah.

PMB: Now, oh the one thing that I didn't... you didn't finish with was the extraction. We've talked about mining, everybody can understand the mining and you had all this oil sand ore going onto these conveyers and it would go into the extraction...

ROUTHIER: Right. Yeah, it would go in the conveyer...

PMB: ... and then what would happen?

ROUTHIER: On the conveyers, they go into the big rotating drums. They had big, big drums. And the slurry would come out of the drum in a slurry of sand, water, oil, rocks, whatever was there. In the bottom there was a screen that would screen it out. And the slurry would go to a certain pump that would pump it into a big vat. Like the vats would be bigger than this room. It would go into that and as it settled, actually the oil would come to the top, the sand would go to the bottom and the water would be coming in between.

PMB: And this room is about, oh what would you think? Thirty, forty feet long by maybe thirty feet wide?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, I would say. There were four of them. And that is where it would settle and then they had these big skimmers that would turn on top, and as the oil would come up it would skim it off and would fall into some troughs along the edges into another pump. And that would go to Plant 4 which Lester will talk to you about, to finally finish the... I will let him tell you about Plant 4. But anyway, they would finish the oil to go into the storage tanks. But, it's surprising, how it comes in tar sand on the belt, it falls in the drum, within in seconds it's going out the other end of the drum and it's in these pumps and into the big vat. It's separating there and then it goes on, on



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and on. And you walk around and then you see the oil just going over the edge. So it was really a great experience to be able to learn how to do this.

PMB: How many people, when you started as a supervisor there, how many people did you have on staff? You personally, how many did you supervise?

ROUTHIER: I had ten in Plant 3 and eight or nine in Plant 4. I had to supervise both. But every shift had each a unit leader between us and the people.

PMB: You needed fewer people.

ROUTHIER: Fewer people. And note that the last years I worked there we were producing oil really good; to compare, not to compare with today because it's just totally different. But for the years that we had been there trying we were doing very, very well, you know, yes.

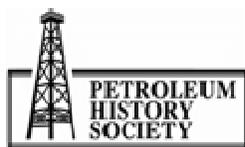
PMB: Okay, any other major changes you would like to talk about before I get onto the... What were the biggest challenges? I guess that's... You've kind of laid them mostly out there.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, that gave us challenges. It was laid on us to... We had, we were there to try and make oil because it was the only way that a company could survive is by making oil. And if we didn't get on there and do our very best to do with what we had, then there would've been no production. So I would say that was one. And especially as a supervisor, it was a time of the life that, I know people figured they'd go there to sleep and get paid for it. And I was not a believer in that and I had many meetings with my guys. And one time I told them, I said, "You know guys, for 12 hours of pay if I could see you guys working 8 hours and take four hours easy-going, as long as you watch what is going on." I said, "I'd be a very happy guy. But I just see its reverse. I see four hours of work and eight hours of play and this can't go on." And this is when, when I saw the superintendent and told him about this and I said, "I can't do it alone, why don't you call a meeting to house supervisors and lay the law of what you want done, so that we can all go out and do the same." Because I said, "If you put the pressure on one group and not on the other, then all they say, what's wrong with him he is just looking for stars or."

That's when I was told, if you I didn't like it I could head down the highway. Just by trying to get something better is what I was trying to hope for, eh. And then, would you believe... well I can't say it for now, but as long as I was there I never did see much of a change. As much as I tried to get these guys to work just a little bit more, keeping the place look cleaner. But if everything was running smooth, well sure take a break. But keep the place clean, keep your pumps clean. The material is there to get with clean. The water is there to whatever you need. But, I do not know, it was just.

PMB: I heard a story. I forget where I... I think I was reading some of the research on this given recently about a fellow who was essentially asleep on the shift.

ROUTHIER: Oh yes, oh yes!



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PMB: And the supervisor came around and said, "Wake up." The guy said, "Leave me alone or I'll quit." And so the supervisor left him alone and he was sleeping on the job.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah. And alcohol was another bad thing. We had the odd one.

PMB: Did you have drugs?

ROUTHIER: No, but would you believe. No, I shouldn't say that. We had one guy that what they used to call diluent. You know that kind of a liquid gasoline type of thing. And the one time one of the operators told me, he said, "I see this guy he takes a bottle of that and he goes."

PMB: He sniffs it, yeah.

ROUTHIER: It was these big control valves. And winter there was a shack over that so that they wouldn't freeze. And he says, he crawls in there and when he comes out, he's... So I guess he really needed or something.

PMB: He's sniffing the stuff.

ROUTHIER: So I watch and watch and sure enough. So when he came up, I went and seen him, I said, "What the hell is going on here?" Well, he said, "Why don't you leave me alone and mind your own business." Thank you, call security, done.

PMB: Okay, I think we're ready to go again. There was a brief interruption.

PMB: Anything else by way of the biggest challenges that you faced?

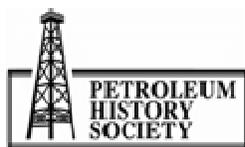
ROUTHIER: Hm. You know as you get older you forget. I'm sure that if I could recall them, I'm sure there must've been. The one thing is, the one thing is, being a shift worker. It was 20 years, all shift work. I never had a day shift job until... even when I was a supervisor I was still a shift worker. That was a challenge because you had your children in hockey; you had children in ball, but...

PMB: So sometimes you'd be doing day shift, sometimes you'd be doing night shift?

ROUTHIER: That's right, yeah, yeah. But by doing this, there was not much chance of being involved with the family. Again, thankful that my wife was the one who would take them to hockey or take them to ball. And whenever I had a chance I would help but that was a challenge. Trying to arrange it so, to be part of the family as well as being part of the company, eh. And thinking back, I think of the time when Mr. Pew, I was the one that asked... We were having a meeting and people were wondering what could this park called by. And I was the one suggested...

PMB: What did you what?

ROUTHIER: To find a name for this ballpark.



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PMB: Oh yeah.

ROUTHIER: And I was the one who said, “Well why wouldn’t it say Mr. Pew because he was a founder here. And he would deserve his name somewhere.” And by God, it went through. So until this day...

PMB: The ballpark is the J. Howard Pew Park

ROUTHIER: Yeah, ballpark. And it also became a picnic area where there water for the kids and all that. And picnic tables and so a...

PMB: Well congratulations to you, because the more I learn about J. Howard Pew the more I admire him.

ROUTHIER: I read a lot about him. Like I read, when the opening was on, in 19...

PMB: Well were you there at the official opening which was, I think September 30th, 1967?

ROUTHIER: No, I missed it. I had, I had some financial problems with some money I’d borrowed for my little family in Lac La Biche. And I had to make a trip to go and straighten all that out. And on my way back it was raining and by the time, with the gravel road, by the time I hit McMurray it was pretty well over with.

PMB: Oh, that’s too bad.

ROUTHIER: So I missed that opportunity, but then I saw the video. In fact, I think I’ve still got the video of that.

PMB: Isn’t that interesting. We’ll come back to that. I might borrow the video so that we could digitize it for this project.

ROUTHIER: Mm-hmm.

PMB: Bob McClements, now he was in charge of construction of the plant and then he was the first, essentially the first plant manager.

ROUTHIER: Yes, CEO, yeah, yeah.

PMB: Can you tell me, because I’m sure you would’ve known him almost from the day you joined the company. And then for the, I think he was four or five years the plant manager.

ROUTHIER: Yeah. Oh yeah, well a...

PMB: Can you tell me a little bit about him?



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ROUTHIER: Mr. McClements, as far as I was concerned had to be the most pleasant person on Earth. In every way possible; whether you were a big guy, or a small guy he always had a minute to stop, ask you how things were going. And always ready to, if there was a question that you wanted to ask him, he was always really there to help out whoever he could. And there was a Mr. Joe Camp, have you ever heard of him?

PMB: Camp? I think I just read a book he wrote.

ROUTHIER: He... yeah, he came after Mr. McClements.

PMB: Yeah, he was with Suncor. Okay.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, he came after Mr. McClements in the same...

PMB: What was his first name?

ROUTHIER: Joe.

PMB: Joe Camp, C-A-M-P.

ROUTHIER: Yeah.

PMB: I saw something he wrote. I was just looking it at upstairs earlier this morning.

ROUTHIER: Oh, is that right, yeah. He was another nice man.

PMB: As long as Sun Oil was running the operation, would you say that was one of the characteristics?

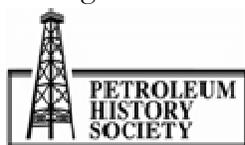
ROUTHIER: Well the two of them, Mr. McClements and Mr. Camp to me, had to be two of the nicest men in their position to be able to stop and take time and talk with people.

PMB: Because they were vice-presidents of the company weren't they?

ROUTHIER: That's right. And there was one year when they were going on strike and minor hockey league didn't know how to get the money to put these kids in school, in a hockey. And Mr. Febrey which was an operator as well, he and I called to ask if we could see Mr. Joe Camp. Well, he says, "If you're going to come, come when it's dark so nobody see you guys." We were union guys, now I guess. He says, "We'll try to come up with something."

PMB: So, sorry, this was a strike probably in the 70s?

ROUTHIER: That first one there, yeah. That little strike, yeah. So we went to there, the wives, his wife, my wife, him and I went in the house. And we told him our score. Well the company was making no much money them days but when it was all over with our discussion, he says, "You know



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what, no kids will go without playing hockey. Go ahead and do it and if it doesn't clear up so that people can pay, we'll pay you." So you know, what can you say?

PMB: Wow. That was McClements or Camp?

ROUTHIER: No, Camp, yeah. And they became our next door neighbor, the Camps did. They had never seen winter eh. So we became really... especially the women became real good neighbors, visit each other. Mrs. Camp was always the one trying to learn from my wife what Canada was all about, everything. So after they moved back to the States we made it a point to go their daughter's wedding in, they were Texas then. But what a wedding, you know like, I refer to that. And then in the meantime, she died of cancer and then he remarried an old school friend that her husband had died of cancer. So we made a point to go and see them here, just two, three years ago. Well again, we were just treated with royalty. There was a room there for us...

PMB: I'm sorry he was a guy who was a vice-president of the company. He probably moved up after he left here.

ROUTHIER: Oh yes and then he retired. He took us all over the country and brought us to a hotel where we take our plane the next morning. And they had to make sure that we had the room and that we were not going to be stuck. You know so, such nice people. My wife and I still go on internet every once in a while with them and they're still doing good. So, you know the memories of people like that, like Mr. McClements and Joe, it just makes you feel that you work for a company that enjoy looking after people that would handle it themselves. Because let's face it, there's many others that didn't do what I did. There are many that prefer to go drinking and then drugs start fitting in. A lot of them lost their job, lots of them just quit because they couldn't handle it anymore. So there's a lot of history there too that, that really was a success story. But mine, myself, I say it was a success story. When I came here with nothing and today I'm living good, living real good.

PMB: Good for you.

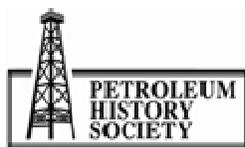
ROUTHIER: Actually, once this is finished I will tell you the...

PMB: Okay, I want to hear that but what I want to do, I want to ask you two things. And you've kind of given me a lot of information about this: How was Suncor as an employer? But I also know that in the late 70s, I think possibly even in 1969, and then in the mid-80s there were strikes. And the one in, I think it was '85 was a terrible strike.

ROUTHIER: Oh yeah, yeah that was a bad.

PMB: So I'd like you to begin by first telling me about how Suncor was as an employer? You've already told me a lot about that.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, well again. To me, as long as you were keeping your nose clean and doing your hours of work, that company will never say nothing against you. But then again, you see others that



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got either fired or did not want to work or whatever, so a lot of them chose to leave. I've heard a lot of them bad mouth the company for what the company is. But as far as I'm concerned, they were the ones that caused their own problem. If they would've kept their nose clean and do their work, they could've stayed there as long as anybody else. So as far as an employer, I don't know, when you see three generation, my family that's still working there, to me it means it has to be a pretty good company.

PMB: So your sons and your grandsons...

ROUTHIER: Grandsons....

PMB: ...are there.

ROUTHIER: And then on top of that, on top of working there they all come out of there with trades. The company will pay them to become a welder, or an electrician, or mechanics. So I had three that were mechanic, one went welder and now they're...

PMB: And they got their training by Suncor?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, they paid for it. They got their ticket and everything. So what more can you ask for? Now the grandson is the one when he went and he's an electrician and he's holding a ticket at about 27, 28 years old. Now he's got this job there for as long as he wants and from what I can gather from people, he just loves it and they just love him. So a lot of the... the youngest, his younger brother he was going to go for steam engineering but he's a little bit different character and he start working as an operator like I was. And he says, "I want to follow in grandpa's footsteps." So today he's getting up there, just right next to being unit leader. And he's happy with his job and everything else. And the other younger, the other grandson he chose to go into accounting because he was a whiz on numbers and he's got a beautiful job there with Suncor as well. So what can I say, it's been a good employer.

PMB: Okay now, we're going to get into the little bit darker stuff. There were strikes. There were a number of problems. I think I remember that the first strike was in 1969 or something. And there were a few. I think there was a bad one in the... toward the end of the 70s. And then there was a terrible one in the mid-80s. Can you just tell me a little bit about that from your experience?

ROUTHIER: Well the first one was kind of a silly thing.

PMB: That was in '69, wasn't it?

ROUTHIER: Yeah... what was it? They were charging us ten cents for a bus ride to the plant and they wanted a free ride and they went on strike for that. So it lasted for a week and then the company give and then we start riding free. That was that, that was settled. So there was not too much. So the second one...



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PMB: Now, before you leave, you were not a unionized shop were you?

ROUTHIER: The first one, no. They were just trying to get unionized. But on the second one, yes, they were unionized. And then the chief of the union there chose to go on strike.

PMB: And what year was that, roughly, the second strike? I'm wondering whether it was '77 or something like that.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, you know what, I forgot the year.

PMB: Okay, so I think mid to maybe late-70s.

ROUTHIER: But lasted about a couple of weeks. But there was few affected by that. A lot of them, they...

PMB: What was the cause of that? What was the issue, do you remember?

ROUTHIER: I'm sorry, I really don't remember. But it was a matter of nothing, from what I can... because all the times it was settled and never seen much changes. It was almost nothing. But the third one, that was the bad one.

PMB: And the third one was in '85, I think, but it lasted for six months.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah.

PMB: First of all, what were the issues?

ROUTHIER: Well, believe me, there was working issues. Some of them wanted to work 12 hour shift. Some of them were against 12 hour shift.

PMB: Now we're talking about the non-management...

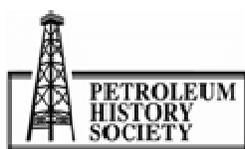
ROUTHIER: Right, yes.

PMB: ...workers?

ROUTHIER: That was one issue. Oh God, what else? It's so sad that you don't remember these things and make note of that when you see them.

PMB: Just keep telling your story and maybe you'll think a little bit more of that later on.

ROUTHIER: The one that really affected me on that one was, like my oldest son was supervising then as a welder. He and I were inside working, the other two boys were on the picket line. And the one choose to give his house back to the company and move to Saskatchewan. By the luck of God,



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when the thing settled down and finally got settled, that was one thing there was quite a few that did that, just left.

PMB: I heard there were about 400 people or something that didn't reappear.

ROUTHIER: They, yeah... some return. But then, when it finally got settled they were offered to come back and get their position back if they wanted it and my son was one that did. Now, I know of some that didn't, they choose to keep going. So, I'm sure that affected a lot of people over again. To me, from the little bit that I can remember it should've been an issue that should've been settled. Between the union and the company, it should've been settled.

PMB: Because there was a strike in the lock-out, wasn't it?

ROUTHIER: But a... yeah, and a...

PMB: So virtually within days or something of the strike, the company just locked everybody out.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, lock everybody out. And that's when we took over operating and making oil.

PMB: And so you and your son who were both supervisors...

ROUTHIER: Yeah.

PMB: ...were basically taking inside, office staff, and maybe people from Calgary...

ROUTHIER: That's right, they were from all over.

PMB: ...and they were... Were there any from the United States?

ROUTHIER: I'm not sure, but I know the...

PMB: Because they would've had to have a work permit?

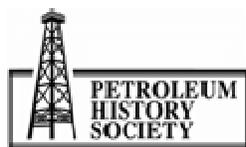
ROUTHIER: ...they even built a little airstrip on the dyke so the little planes would come in and bring the people, so they wouldn't have to cross the picket line.

PMB: The picket line. And there, there was actually a camp inside the...

ROUTHIER: Oh yeah, oh yeah, definitely, yeah.

PMB: ...inside the plant grounds.

ROUTHIER: Because that was nothing, with men and women. And they had to put security there because there was a little bit of action going on there from what I can gather but... it could have been only talk.



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PMB: Yeah.

ROUTHIER: I was lucky enough, they gave me a room. I think I was in there for about a week. And then my brother got killed so they flew me out to the airport here and somebody came and picked me up.

PMB: So people were not actually coming in by vehicle, they were coming in by plane?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah.

PMB: In and out.

ROUTHIER: Yeah. And then after the funeral and all that and I went back to work, well then they start crossing the picket line with buses. And you would have these guys just... So we were told not to look out the window. They throw...

PMB: And they were throwing rocks and...

ROUTHIER: ... throw stuff at the buses and what not. They finally got that cleared up and...

PMB: But I heard stories and I read a book that talked about this. Said there were pitched battles between the workers and the strikers. And they were throwing rocks.

ROUTHIER: They were throwing at the buses. In fact I was on a bus, when they hit the bus with rocks. In fact, my son's girlfriend was one of them and she got pinched for that. She paid a fine.

PMB: She was throwing rocks?

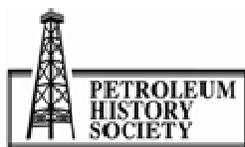
ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah. A bunch of them got all excited.

PMB: Wow. Is this now your daughter-in-law?

ROUTHIER: No, because he left her.

PMB: He didn't believe in throwing rocks, huh? Then it finally ended after six months. Can you tell me, can you think of anymore of the issues that were on the table? I'm going to be asking the other two interviewees today, so.

ROUTHIER: Yeah. You might have a little better...but just... But I will say one thing, one of the issues that I didn't like is, okay we would have guys call us all kinds of names when we cross the picket line. And when it finally got fixed that the workers would come back to work, they would come back to work at midnight. And the company told us, treat them like as if nothing ever happened. Don't let anything, the feeling forget it. Even if he got a feeling against a person for what he told you already, forget it. Treat them like it was before. So, lucky enough that was done.



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Actually, on my shift I know that it was done. But there was a bit of an ill feeling. They come back to work but they still have that feeling. And I would say, that was the time that when they started that they didn't really want to work. They'd come to work, like I was telling you earlier we almost had to plead with them to get things done. And if you tried to push them too much well then you were this and you were that, company man and whatnot.

So I don't know if the strike took an effect on them to lead them, lead the operators to be that way or what, I don't know, in extraction. Now in other parts of the plant I can't say. As far as in the mine, no, the machine has got to run and if you like it or not it's got to run. If it doesn't run, we'll get somebody else who will run it. So that there, I think they would have to go. But I know with us there were feelings, there were certainly some feelings that we tried to hide but it was still there.

PMB: Now, I read, this again is that book that I read about the company and about that strike. I read that after six months... Well there was some kind of informal agreement between (I think his name was Supple...

ROUTHIER: Mm-hmm, yeah-yeah.

PMB: ...the vice-president of human resources.) Supple and the union leader (and I've forgotten his name). The union worked with management to cut costs and they could demonstrate that within six months. If they could cut costs by half a million a year and there were a thousand workers at that time, then each of those workers would be compensated.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, Supple was kind of a man of his own. Even though I got to know Supple personally, pretty well, eh? But he had his problems there. And then they brought this lady, I forget her name now. She became the... maybe Lester will remember her name.

PMB: It doesn't matter.

ROUTHIER: But she was the one that started straightening things out, even though everybody was saying no woman can run this plant, but she proved them wrong.

PMB: Well I certainly got the impression from this book that Supple was part of the problem.

ROUTHIER: Mm-hmm.

PMB: And I don't know whether that's true or not.

ROUTHIER: And quite stubborn.

PMB: Yeah.

ROUTHIER: And of course, the guy in the union was the same way, because once it was settled he left town. He couldn't even face it.



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PMB: Oh, okay. Do you have any idea what the terms of the fix were? What did they finally agree?

ROUTHIER: I really don't know.

PMB: Okay, it doesn't matter. But I am going to ask the other guys.

ROUTHIER: Yeah, they might just remember where I don't.

PMB: Now if you came here in 1966, the population of this town would've been, was it two or three thousand?

ROUTHIER: At the very most, yeah.

PMB: Fort McMurray?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah. At some point, alone GCOS was about 1500. That was about 1500.

PMB: Oh, now it's sixty thousand?

ROUTHIER: They're talking a hundred now. They say that if they were to count all the people outside the outlying areas, like the plants or the big camps and many people stay straight out there, they don't even come to town that they'd be in the hundred thousand.

PMB: Okay, but I think actually. I looked at the Canadian Census for 2011 last week, and I think that the number, in 2011, the official census for Fort McMurray said sixty-five thousand roughly for this area.

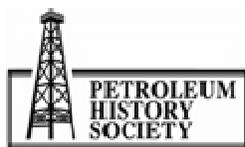
ROUTHIER: Yeah, but the mayor was saying the other day that that was a wrong number, because not a lot of people... because what's happening, you've got a house, you've got a couple spare bedrooms and there's people looking for bedrooms. So you rent them the rooms and when they come to door, it's just me and my wife here, so those two guys aren't counted. But you look on the streets every house has got four or five bloody vehicles. Some of them even built... one of them, they took a garage and built two bedrooms in his garage and put a heating system in there and toilets. They're used to be seven vehicles in that one place, so between the house and the... So that's what kind of knocked the...

PMB: Okay, so that would be kind of a social problem a little bit, wouldn't it?

ROUTHIER: Yeah, yeah.

PMB: Tell me about Fort McMurray as a town to live in and as a town with its own problems?

ROUTHIER: Well okay, I guess we'll go with problems first. We all know drugs is one of the big problems. We found lately, well it's been pretty well... the price of food, gasoline is a little bit... quite



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a bit higher if say you go to Edmonton. But then again, you've got to look at the freight to haul the 400 kilometres, 450 kilometres.

PMB: Typically, somebody in Fort McMurray makes more money.

ROUTHIER: You would make more money. So, all in all, how could I say it? I still think it's a pretty fair town to live in. Now that Suncor, again, help build this big place on the island there. Beautiful little creation place. Everything is there for anybody older or young.

PMB: What's the island called again?

ROUTHIER: McDonald Island. And that alone, if you want to go for a walk inside, if you're an older person there is a walkway. They have swimming. There are exercise machine. It is all there for people to use. Golf course, there is three good full golf courses. If people want to live and enjoy the city as far as I'm concerned, it's all there. But then you've got again, like it was before you always got one on the back track. That prefers to go on drugs and fight and kill and stab. So you got that too, eh. But personally, myself, I enjoy living here. That's why I'm here for 45 years.

PMB: You don't give any thought to the cold, the winter cold?

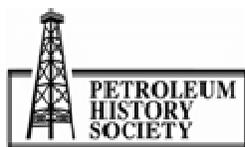
ROUTHIER: No, no. I guess being born a Canadian north person, living in north all my life that I enjoy winter. Even when it's cold I enjoy winter. So... but then I guess if I was a southerner, no maybe I wouldn't like it. But... in fact, when the first snowfalls in the fall I really enjoy that.

PMB: Okay, I'm going to give you a chance to tell me anything you want that you think would maybe astound me. Or astound anybody in the future who will read this transcription or listen to this recording?

ROUTHIER: I guess, well the one thing I'd like to go back a little bit before Suncor days, I was in Fort McMurray.

PMB: You were in....

ROUTHIER: Yeah, I was working here, eh. I came here with the same company I was working in Lac La Biche to do some logging up the Clearwater River. Again, that was an experience of its own. There was a man from Edmonton that was our boss. Came here with a big truck and a cat, and I had a cat from the company. And we worked out in the bush. He never paid anybody. I phoned my boss, I told him, I says, "You know, the way things are going here, I don't think you'll ever get paid for your cat." Well he says, "Are you afraid of your wages?" I say, "No. I'm not afraid of wages." He says, "Leave the rest to me, I'll look after that." I said, "Okay." and just kept working. Finally came time to get out of there in spring, and I phoned him again and I said, "You know, the creeks are flooding and if we don't get that machine out of there, it's going to be there all summer." Because we were way further, 15 - 20 kilometres up the river. So he gives me the okay to take it out.



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While I was trying to load the cat to go across the river, the water was right above the floor boards. And, we had to put it on the railroad to ship it to Lac La Biche. And I told the boss, I say, "Do we build a machine to ship it out." "Well, I got no money." Then I phoned the boss again, and I say, "He's not shipping it because he's got no money." Well he says, "I'll fix it." So, he arranged for the railroad to bring his machine back to Lac La Biche. Then I left and I found out later that that company completely went broke. All those logs that we had cut and skidded stayed out in the bush to rot away by somebody that just didn't have it, eh. All he liked to do was go drink beer and look at women. He was a big Irishman, nice looking, curly hair and he'd be looking for women. See, that was his life.

END OF INTERVIEW



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