Mike Supple

Date and place of birth (if available): November 30, 1934; United Kingdom

Date and place of interview: June 11, 2012, 127 Solace Ridge Place in Calgary.

Name of interviewer: Brian Brennan

Name of videographer: Peter Tombrowski

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

Consent form signed: Yes

Initials of Interviewer: BB

Last name of subject: SUPPLE

BB: My name is Brian Brennan. Today, on Monday, June the 11th, 2012, I am speaking with Mr. Mike Supple for the Petroleum History Society Oil Sands Oral History Project. We are conducting this interview at his home, which is located just west of Calgary. Also with me today is Peter Tombrowski, who is recording the interview on video. Mr. Supple is the former executive vice-president of Suncor, and the former chairman and chief executive officer of Synenco Energy. Did I get that right?

SUPPLE: You did.

BB: Good! Thanks, Mike, for being available this afternoon. We'll try and be as expedient as possible, because of your next appointment. Maybe you could begin by just giving us a brief biography of yourself. Where you were born, where you went to school, that sort of thing?

SUPPLE: Well, I was born in England, in the north of England. And, my parents are both Irish and I spent a lot of time in Ireland as a boy growing up.

BB: What part of Ireland?

SUPPLE: County Cork, just outside Youghal. They're all farming people in that area. The old castle of Ightermurragh, which is just close by, is my e-mail address. I have Anglicized it, but it is "ictamura", phonetically. So, anyway, that is my background and I did go to school and university in the UK; a private secondary school, and then to Birmingham University, where I did my graduate degree and my post-graduate degree.

BB: In engineering?

SUPPLE: Yes. Well, my graduate was in chemistry with engineering, and then my post-graduate was in chemical engineering.

SUPPLE: So, that's my educational background, and family background. In those days, it was in our DNA that we just had a work ethic and we just wanted to get out of school and earn a living. So, I wanted to do that very strongly right from the get-go. I usually took jobs in the summer right from high school through to university, and all from high-building scaffolding to delivering mail. Just anything that kept the money coming. So, after that I went into the oil industry with M.W. Kellogg, which is now part of the Halliburton conglomerate of industries. This was firstly in London, but we were building refineries in Europe and in the UK, out of London. And, I did a little travelling. But, then I wanted to get into the real oil business, not just engineering for the oil business. And, so after about two years there, we went out to the Middle East. I'd married just before we left, and we actually had a child in London just before we left. And, then two children now in the Middle East, and then one child back in Europe.

The name of the company that I worked for out of there was called, Caltex. And, they were a conglomerate, at that time, of Standard Oil of California and Texaco. They were 50/50 owned. I saw a lot of the oil business from the production end to the loading into tankers, right there in the Persian Gulf. It was very good grounding for me in the oil business, the diversity of jobs. And, I worked pretty hard at augmenting my skills in a practical way, at that time. Later, I moved back to the UK for a short while with Gulf. That was the old Gulf that was owned by the great oil family out of Pittsburgh, the Mellons.

The Mellons were the majority owners when I joined Gulf, at that time. They started building a big refinery at a place called Milford Haven on an estuary. And, I got some work back in London, too, working in the logistics department. It was responsible for the movement and the supplying of markets for the whole of what they called the western hemisphere – mainly here in the US and Canada – and the eastern hemisphere, being Europe and all points east. So, that again added to my experience in the Gulf and getting another insight of working in that business. So, from there I came to Canada in the early '70s. I had been headhunted by somebody looking for someone with my skills. And, I ended up in what was called GCOS at that time.

BB: Oh, so right into the oil sands then when you came here?

SUPPLE: Pretty much, yeah. First, I had a short stay in Quebec, in Montreal, just to find my feet. That was in '75, and then in '76 I moved out west. That was where the opportunity was for a person that knows the fundamentals of the oil business like me.

And this was influenced by some people that approached me and persuaded me that this was the way to come. So, I did that. And, I never looked back, really. So from 1975 onwards, just being part of the whole oil sands up until about '92, when I retired from Suncor as it was then. When I joined it was GCOS, which was a subsidiary of the Sun Company out of Radnor, Pennsylvania. Which was owned by another great family, the Pews. Howard Pew was the main protagonist who built that company.

But anyway, that kind of explains how I got here to Alberta, and the headquarters were in Edmonton. My kids were in the school in Edmonton. But, very quickly, the company wanted me to

go up to Fort McMurray. I was in a chief engineer role out of Edmonton. And, they were running their whole administration, engineering … everything but plant technical services was in Edmonton.

I was the leader of an evaluation of the corporation, which was losing a considerable amount of money at the time. What do we have to do to make it profitable? The results were pretty fundamental from the study that I led, and I made recommendations to the sub-board back in Radnor. And then, there was the problem with the plant: it was not adequately kept up. It was failing too often, for one. thing And two, even if you could run it 99% of the time – which was impossible – but if you could, it still would lose money because it just wasn't making enough from the production to cover its fixed costs.

BB: So, given that it was losing money, why do you think they wanted to continue on with the project? Was there an expectation, perhaps, that eventually it would be profitable?

SUPPLE: Well, Howard Pew himself had put his reputation behind it. And, he had many conversations with the Premier of Alberta. I think it was Social Credit at that time, maybe Aberhart or someone like that.

BB: Well, let's see... we're talking '75?

SUPPLE: No, we're talking '60s, prior to me arriving.

BB: That would be Manning. That would be Premier Ernest Manning.

SUPPLE: And, he was a fundamental Christian, and so was Howard Pew, and they hit it off. They felt that as part of their Christian faith that they had to give something. And, I think Manning felt it was a resource that was important to Alberta, and to the future generations, and so did Pew. So, I think that's why they hung in, basically, and created a culture of seeing it through.

So, when I joined there was that sense, Brian, that we should make something of this. I'd been imbued, although Mr. Pew was no longer there, and neither was Mr. Manning. But, there'd been a sense of purpose that we could make something out of this left in the organization, in the Sun Company. So, we got it and the results from my study were that we should spend several hundred million, which is, in today's language, several billion. And that we should double the capacity from what was like twenty-five, thirty thousand barrels a day at that time, up to about fifty thousand barrels a day, almost double the capacity. And, while we were doing that, take out these operating restraints and get a lot more certainty in the production of the plant. So, we did that. I spent a lot of time on a plane, going back and forth from Fort McMurray; Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Radnor, Pennsylvania. And, laying out the plan, and the plan was then embraced by the same company that essentially was the owner.

So, it was a privilege really, to be given that responsibility. In the end days of convincing the Sun board that they should take all that money and to get it right for once and for all, there was a major strike of the union in Fort McMurray. Now, remember we were the only operation at the time of any significance. Suncor, I mean ...

BB: Syncrude?

SUPPLE: Yes, Syncrude was just getting started building in '76. It wasn't really going. So, we had this terrific strike. And, I do not know why, I must've been the blue-eyed boy or something, but they could see the work ethic that I had. So, they asked me to go to Fort McMurray and be 100% responsible for the night shift. The vice-president there, a guy called Joe Camp who was my mentor up there, he ran the plant. But, he couldn't run it 24 hours, and it was being run by everyone that they could get: from a typist to accountants and others who had quick lessons and then were all put on shift. So, the whole thing was going for 24 hours. It was a great responsibility and a great learning process too: to be in charge of that whole plant from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m., and I did that every night.

BB: May I just interrupt a moment. How long did the strike last?

SUPPLE: Several weeks.

BB: Did they have to bring in replacement workers?

SUPPLE: Oh, yeah it was all replacement workers, including me as a replacement worker. But, at the same time, this coincided with me making this play to the board back in Radnor, Pennsylvania, to make these investments. And, put a platform that would be successful commercially. So, the upshot of that was I got pneumonia because I was working for 12 hours every night and then, at 8:00 o'clock, when I came off, they'd have a plane waiting for me in Fort McMurray to fly me to Edmonton to get a flight to Toronto. They'd have another plane waiting for me there to fly me to Pennsylvania. Then I'd come back to start on the night shift.

BB: All in one day?

SUPPLE: Yes. So I did burn the candles at both ends there. And that was basically it. The rollout of that was that the money was put in the plant, and it was stabilized at about 50,000 barrels a day. We did solve the strike, too, so we tied it all up together.

BB: Was there any ever question of the Sun board turning off the tap and saying, that's it as far as investment is concerned?

SUPPLE: Not at that time, no. Not in '78, '79. That came later. A long time after J. Howard had passed away, there was a different attitude.

BB: They were taking a long hard look at the economics?

SUPPLE: Yes. So, to go on from there, notwithstanding what I have said, it was still the world's largest pilot plant, okay? The only one in existence in the oil sands, and we were still trailblazing. They did all kinds of different things to make it successful. I think we finally started to focus on all of the elements that made a commercial success. And, my claim to fame is turning it around from that large loss.

During this time I was climbing the ladder, and Joe Camp went back to Philadelphia. I was put in his place. I ran the whole operation from an operational viewpoint, the operating and maintenance side of the business, and then gradually they loaded me up with everything: The accounting, the responsibility for profit, the responsibility for labour relations, public relations, government relations, the whole thing until I finally was made a VP with the total profit centre under me up

there. And, that profit centre was, like, 80% of the profit made by Suncor. It was a major profit centre.

So, anyway, I think my focus at that time was the balancing between finding the right position between cost and production. And, in a world at that time, when we were less than $10.00 a barrel for oil price, you know, people forget about that. Even, in the early '80s, it was still bad. We were still losing money. When I first took over, it was costing us something like $30.00 a barrel. We got it down to $15.00 a barrel, and we got that by getting the number of barrels up. So we got the enumerator, the cost side, and the denominator, we got them right. Finally, we got it down to about $15.00 a barrel, where we could make money, and oil prices had come up to $15.00 by then. So, finally we turned the corner. I started my story in the mid-70s, and it had to be the mid-80s before we were firmly in a profitable situation. We were confidently predicting profitability.

Now, it cost more to do that. There was still cost, capital cost, investments as we went along that path. And, you asked earlier, Brian, about the Sun Company. The Sun Company decided, along the way, and I'm not sure of this continuum, where that decision was made. But, they started divesting themselves of Suncor, of this operation. And, you may recall that they sold 25% to the Ontario Government. We were involved in that sale, all of us top executives here were involved in making the pitch and making the sale to the Ontario Government. Who was it, the premier at that time? Peterson?

BB: Bill Davis?

SUPPLE: Davis, Davis, yeah. So, he was the one that jumped in. And, that was when prices started moving up. They'd gone to the double digit; it looked like they were going to go higher. And, I think he thought, the way it goes in the world on oil prices and availability, one year we're awash in the stuff and the next year we're at the end of peak oil. So, he thought it was good for them to be in. And, that's why he bought in. And, he had some good Liberals on the board at that time that he parachuted in: Heather Reisman and Don Smith from the [EllisDon] construction company. And, you know Heather Reisman, of course, Indigo Books?

BB: Sure, yeah.

SUPPLE: ...and her husband, Gerry Schwartz. Anyway, it was an interesting board to interface with this government ownership. Finally, the Ontario Government decided they wanted to be out. Sun Company decided they wanted to be in. And, I can remember the days when we were – Bill Oliver, myself and some others – were trying to figure out what the name should be and we were all putting stuff into the pot.

BB: So was there a suggestion that the Sun name would be gone from it?

SUPPLE: Well, we had to pick a name.

BB: Oh, okay.

SUPPLE: We were allowed to keep the Sunoco brand for the marketing end, but we had to pick an overall name. And, so we sold their share, and we sold the Ontario Government share, and we did a 100% float on the TSE. So, all those shares were floated out through brokers and everything, and

the name of the company was Suncor. It was historical, with the Sun history and the Sunoco brand, so it looked like it was the right thing. I think Bill Oliver was the guy that came up with the name.

BB: What year would it have become Suncor, then?

SUPPLE: Mid-'80s, something like that.

BB: What did it take to bring the production costs down where you could start moving towards profitability? What were some of the physical things that needed to be done to achieve that?

SUPPLE: One of the first things we did was to model the plant. We put into a computer a model of the plant, so we could test the plant's constraints when we expanded this, or ... what were the pinch points? Because, it is a long way from oil in the ground to oil in the plant line, and that's a big journey that it takes in between. And, we had conveyors at that time. We had bucket-wheels at that time. We had the hot water extraction plant. We had the centrifugal plant that was taking out all the waters and rejecting sand, etc. back to tailings ponds. And then, we went into the cokers, and then from there we produced hydrogen and treated them; the coker products to make an upgraded, synthetic crude oil. So, there were a lot of steps and a lot of things that needed testing. Maybe we needed more compressors, we needed more pumps and we needed more equipment, double our conveyors and things like that. So, that if one failed, we had a back up.

But, it was all aided by constructing a pretty good model that replicated what all the components that went together that produced oil at the end. An augmentation or a loss of any of these components that were in this long chain; all of those links had to be tested to see which ones we needed to boost, were too weak, or which ones we could ignore. They did the job okay. It was a pretty analytical job.

So, that speaks to the production side. The cost per barrel is the thing. So, you are looking to optimizing the barrels in any given year. And that spoke to the divisor in the equation. How many barrels are you making? And, on the top line we looked at costs. So, we analyzed costs very carefully and we wanted to see how much we could get out of the costs; how much streamlining we could do on the costs from everything from our production of power and our purchase of outside power, to manpower. In that whole continuum, I had every job analyzed, every job base-lined. And, I think we went from 3,500 people at 50,000 barrels a day to 2,000 people at 75,000 barrels a day.

You think about that being a very large fixed cost. Because, Fort McMurray and those oil sands plants aren't auto plants. You can't count on layoffs when production is low because you are pretty much the only employer. We were at that time. We had company housing. I can remember we'd had a strike once and we had to forgive people paying their rent because they were on strike. They didn't have any income to pay their rent. We also happened to be the owners of the homes that they were buying off us.

We had to look at every component of cost and how much we'd paid for outside maintenance, whether we would shop out a job versus doing it inside. We had the constraints of the union so we always were fighting with the union about what we could shop out versus what the union members had a right to.

BB: Was it a particular union or were there different unions of the plant?

SUPPLE: No, we had one major union that was called the MIOW – McMurray Independent Oil Workers – during the early periods. And, they were very obstructive and I, personally, had some really tough times with them.

BB: Were they part of a larger union, then?

SUPPLE: No, not at that time.

BB: So, they were basically an in-house union then.

SUPPLE: That's right, an independent union, McMurray Independent Oil Workers. They tried some of the bigger unions but they decided that they were so unique up there that they made their own. And then, we got into a major showdown with them in the mid-80s.

BB: Was this over wages or working conditions or … ?

SUPPLE: All of the above. They didn't like the way that I was cutting back the work, streamlining the work, reducing the membership, etc. So, we took a major strike. The board was very much behind it. We ran the plant. I don't know how long the strike was, three months, maybe. It was a long strike. It was ... rowdyism, hooliganism ... things like that. I had to have a guard on my house.

BB: Wow!

SUPPLE: I had to helicopter into work. I couldn't drive into work. And, it was quite tense.

BB: So, you've had your share of union troubles then, during your time there?

SUPPLE: Oh, yes. We finally settled. The membership wanted to go back; they didn't want to keep fighting. My wife, of course, was the very best labour relations person. When she was down in Safeway doing her groceries and the ladies would come up to her and say, "Mrs. Supple," you know, very respectful, "Will you please tell your husband to take us back, because this union are taking us in a direction we don't want to go."

BB: So, you were actually living in Fort McMurray then?

SUPPLE: Oh, all the time.

SUPPLE: Thirteen years there. You couldn't do this one business, you couldn't turn that plant around for instance, so this was all in Fort McMurray. My wife was there, and my wife would tell them, "Well, ratify the offer and you will go back to work."

And, Peter Pocklington was having a strike at Gainers in Edmonton at that time, and it got very nasty. I don't whether you remember?

BB: I do, yes.

SUPPLE: And, he shut them out and said, "The jobs have gone. I have hired other people. I have hired non-union to take their job." So, the TV would come up there at Fort McMurray to me, and they'd say, "Have you heard what Mr. Pocklington's done." And, I'd say, "Yes." And, they'd say,

"So, what's your attitude Mr. Supple?" I said, "My attitude is that I want my employees back and their jobs are waiting for them." I'd take all the heat out of it. Let Pocklington throw his chest out, light a match, and do whatever. With my wife telling the wives and stuff like that, ultimately they got rid of the union.

BB: So, there was no union after that?

SUPPLE: Oh, no, there is a union. The new union was the Oil and Chemical Workers Union. They came in to see me, we cut a deal, and they said, "Okay."

They went in and took over. They went in with a deal. See, the old union were using the intimidation; they'd got the bullyboys in. So, a lot of the membership wanted to go back and wanted to put their hands up to kill the strike. But they didn't dare, because they'd got the heavyweights in the crowd at the union hall. So, anyway, it was pretty nasty. But, I am still friends with Don Marchand the union leader, who was the union leader at that time; he wasn't after it was all over. Because, the new union came in and ratified a new executive and stuff like that. And, basically, it was a turning point for the industry. We just kept going on from there. My son worked at Suncor as a union person right through this whole time. He was a heavy-duty mechanic, and that was a union job.

Anyway, my daughter left the coal project and she went to Fluor. Then she was the financial controller on the Kearl Project that Exxon are building. They have moved her to Perth. And, that is only a $13 Billion job; they've moved her onto an $18 Billion job in Perth, Australia.

But, she has worked the oil sands all of her working life, almost. My granddaughter's up there right now working on the Syncrude project. So, you could say, we're kind of an oil sands family.

BB: You are indeed. So, you and your son must have had some interesting discussions at the dinner table about labour relations.

SUPPLE: Oh yeah. But, you don't let that stuff get in the way. It's life; it's got to be dealt with. So, anyway, I got it working and profitable and I put a lot of time in and I wanted out. I told the board that in '91. In '92 we got a replacement in for me. And so, I came down, worked in Calgary for a few months on the transition and that was it. And, I thought, maybe I'd seen the last of the oil sands. But then, maybe it was too deep in my blood, so in the beginning of the year 2000 we started up Synenco. And, everybody said, "Oh, Mike's lost his marbles in his old age, there's no oil sands up there." They were wrong, obviously. Two billion barrels of oil later which we discovered on our property, it was a very different experience; because, here we were going in totally grass roots...

BB: Start-up?

SUPPLE: Start-up, trying to build a better mousetrap. And, make sure that that mousetrap fitted the oil sands that we had, and the geological disposition of those sands. And, we did, but I think the lesson I learned from that is that the oil sands need very deep pockets to execute. It is okay discovering, designing, but then when you get into the big-ticket items you've got to spend to make it go. There is no start-up company in the oil sands that is operating a commercial plant today. I sold out first to Sinovac, 40%, then the other 60% went to Total. That was in 2008. So, from 2000 to 2008 we developed the oil sands. We did the mine planning. We did all the cost estimates. We did

the engineering, all the front-end engineering. We set up all the technologies. We then flipped the whole project, the Northern Lights Project, as we called it. We flipped it to those two partners.

BB: Why did you sell?

SUPPLE: Because to execute the project ourselves, we had to raise so much money. That would have diluted our shares right down to the point ... it pushes out the time horizon for the shares to become worth anything again. Because, you dilute the shares with all the front-end cash you've got to raise, the billions of dollars. So, we took the money because it was there for the shareholders.

And, the current project that I'm involved in, that I'm going to this meeting at four o'clock, is an oil shale. It's not an oil sand. It's not conventional, like oil sand. It is in eastern Saskatchewan and our strategy is to follow the same as Synenco but more streamlined. We'll go straight for a flip after maybe two years of developing the project. Because, the sale of Synenco was pretty easy, all you had to do was prove that the oil was there; in a nice economic disposition in the ground. All you had to do then was point to Suncor and Syncrude and later Shell and then CNRL, and say, "Well, same as them. We'll just do the same as they're doing." And so, everybody says, "Yeah." So, there is no step-out technology.

This thing is a bit different because what we're going to have to do is show that there's a feasible economic and technically feasible solution to getting the oil out of the shale. And, you can't point to another operation in Canada. There is no shale oil operation in Canada. And, this is a mining operation; it's not the Bakken shale which is a different shale, that's in southern Saskatchewan and over in the Dakotas. But, this shale is very shallow and it's almost like a Prairie strip mine, a coal strip mine. So, we just push the overburden aside, expose the shale, the saturated shale, and then crush it and send it to a re-torque to heat the shale and drive the oil off. Then we send the shale back into the pit, no tailings ponds, no water, just a heat process, most of the heat is derived from the carbon that is made from burning the oil off the shale. So, it's a much simpler process, and we are going to show the economic feasibility of it and then we're going to sell it to someone like Total or Shell, or whatever.

BB: So, you say there isn't one in Canada. Is there one in the States?

SUPPLE: No.

BB: So, none in North America.

SUPPLE: Not in North America, no. Suncor tried one in Australia. They abandoned that because of odours. It was very wet and there was a lot of odour. When they were drying, the dryness gave out a lot of odour and the neighbouring towns complained. They withdrew because of that environmental liability. But, you know, the back-end work, the extraction part worked. Fortunately, our shale in Saskatchewan is dry so we do not have an odour problem. We just put it straight into the extraction system and that will drive off the odour.

BB: Let's just jump back a little bit to your Suncor days. You would've been right there, of course, when the decision made to move from bucket-wheels and conveyor belts to trucks and shovels. What was some of the thinking that went into that?

SUPPLE: The flexibility. Basically, some of the deposits were getting quite variable. Some of them thickened and some of them thinned. And, what a bucket-wheel gave you in a stable mining situation was constant delivery and break-up of the oil sands. However, the belts were always a problem. The oil sand would stick to the belts in the hot summers. And, it would tear up the belts with frozen lumps in the winter. And, there were various factors like that, in total, which made their operation quite problematic. On my shift, we did the study. The final implementation was done on the cusp of my handover, but the decision was made by myself and others that the economics ... You've got to understand, too, that the trucks were getting bigger and the shovels were getting bigger.

So, your ability to move the very large tonnages required, was just going up and up and up. In the early days, when I was there, a big truck was a hundred tonnes, now they're five or six hundred tonnes of dirt that they can carry. The shovels were tiny compared to the ones they have now. So, that whole technology actually moved along and made it feasible to make the changeover. So, does that answer your question?

BB: You talk about the flexibility, was there an economic decision as well?

SUPPLE: Oh, yes there was.

BB: Was it going to be cheaper?

SUPPLE: Yes, it was an economic decision. You could move a heck of a lot more dirt. In the earlier days, the equipment was so small that the bucket-wheels out-gunned the equipment. But then, the size of that equipment went up dramatically. Like I said, three and four fold from a hundred ton to four hundred, five hundred ton.

BB: We hear about them as operating in the oil sands. Do they operate in other mining type situations as well?

SUPPLE: Oh yes. You will see shots of a big hole in the ground in copper mining. And, you see the trucks coming up out of the hole. It is almost a corkscrew spiral as they come out of the deep mine to get to the surface to drop the ore for it to be processed.

BB: So, realistically, any strip mining operation could be using vehicles like that?

SUPPLE: Oh, yes, and are. Some of the big coalmines, open-pit coalmines, are using that. And also, I might add, so will this shale deposit that I'm talking about. It's got only, for every hundred foot depth of ore, and the oil sands has a hundred foot of overburden, on average. Our shale only has fifty feet of overburden to move. So, we do have to crush it before we send it. But, we will go back to conveyors; we won't use trucks because our distances are quite long from where we mine to the central plant. And, we can't move the central plant very well. So, we will probably end up with conveyors as far as this deposit is concerned. And that's because the shale is immune to summer or winter. It just is the same. It is a fairly hard rock that can take either.

BB: So, getting Suncor to profitability, that was your big achievement during your time there?

SUPPLE: Oh, yes. My technical capacity, my analytical mind was very much a part of finding out, analyzing what all the elements were of success for our oil sands, for Suncor's oil sands. But, I

wasn't a great technical mind; more of being able to combine the technical know-how and the learning that I've gone through in life with the ability to make money. To understand the essence of profitability for that operation, and it was, like I said, the enumerator and the denominator. And in playing with both, you're trying to get one high and the other low, so your costs per barrel are always diminishing. And, I think that Suncor still has that culture. It's been a long time since I left but I think to this day that culture ... I think Rick George, who has been lauded as the leader, I think he was the right man at the right time. I think he carried that culture, and improved on it. And, he has just seen what scale does, and has just kept adding, scale-wise. The acquisition of Petro-Canada was the ultimate scale jump. And, he's got a corporation now that has huge mines, huge extraction, big facilities that capture all the efficiencies of scale. And, I started right at the beginning. You could look at his curve and I only took it here [indicates to his chest level] and he took it right to there [indicates to above his head]. So, he made some wonderful advances.

BB: You took it to here, but it was way down there when you started?

SUPPLE: Well, it was below water when I took it over. What my group did was to prove its commercial feasibility. We took it from a loser to a winner. And, Rick just took it then to a huge winner.

BB: Well, good for you. You turned it around. And, you've been recognized for that. You've received a couple big awards for doing that.

SUPPLE: Oh yeah, got a few of those. I am not a big ego guy for that kind of stuff. I really like the satisfaction of making things happen and work. Big things, like that; I really get a great deal of self-fulfillment from having made that one work and having shown that we can start a little one, too, and have it be significant. This whole shale is just another... upstairs you might have been dazzled by my ego, but you should look at Don Quixote. You know he tilted at windmills.

BB: Did you ever have doubts along the way? Did you ever, late at night, say to yourself, "We're never going to make it? We're never going to be profitable?"

SUPPLE: No, I never had those kinds of doubts. I had worries. I worry to this day. Somebody called me once at Synenco, they said, "You're not CEO, you're CWO." I said, "What's that?" They said, "Chief Worry Officer." "You're always worrying about, 'Are we doing this right, are we doing that right?' questioning all the decisions. I worried in that respect, and worried about our record. Because, we had a very poor safety record when I first took over the whole thing, and it was abysmal. We had at least one fatality a year. Had a lot of people injured, badly injured.

BB: And, there were some fires, were there not?

SUPPLE: And, we had fires and things like that. We'd shut down the operation and hurt profitability. I sent myself on courses, on safety and workplace safety, etc. I really worked hard on that side of the equation too. And, I'll show you my office upstairs before you go. You're going to see lots of boat pictures, of all my boats that I've owned in my lifetime. And, I'm a great ship-shape guy. If you can't have the workplace clean and ship-shape, then you're going to have injuries.

BB: That's your philosophy of life?

SUPPLE: Yeah, my boats have no lines hanging around the decks for people to fall over the side by tripping on a line or anything like that. It was tough. We had some really tough learning processes up there. I remember one cold night, minus 30, minus 40 or whatever it was. We were doing some maintenance on a bucket-wheel, on the night shift that went 24 hours. And, they had put up some scaffolding. They had put some big sheets of canvas around to keep the heat in while they were working on these replacement teeth, or whatever they were doing with the bucket-wheels. A guy came in and he starts welding down below, and there's a guy up top who pulled the canvas, and he's on a platform above this other guy. And he pulled the canvas and he didn't realize that someone on the night shift had left a 30-gallon open drum of some cleansing spirit. And, it just dumped right on the welder who was sparking away there, of course, and he just burned to death. And, that was somebody not cleaning up at the end of his shift. So, that shift comes in, they don't realize it's there. You couldn't have a more pointed demonstration of these things. So, I had to do a heck of a lot of implementation of discipline. Good safety gives you good productivity. It's a continuum. When people talk about pioneering, there was a lot of learning in many disciplines, in many aspects of the operation of a huge facility like that.

BB: Mike, I'm conscious of your time and I know you've got to go.

SUPPLE: Yeah, I've got to go.

BB: We might pick this up again, because I'm sure you've got more stories that you'd like to tell about your oil sands experiences. But, I'll be in touch and we can chat a little more. Thanks for your time, I appreciate that.

SUPPLE: Thank you, Brian.

[END OF INTERVIEW - 1 HOUR & 11 MINUTES]