

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: W. D. Bill Evans - CSEG Presidency

INTERVIEWER: David Finch

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DF: Today is the 24th day of May in the year 2000 and we are with Mr. Bill Evans at the offices of the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists in Calgary. My name is David Finch. Could you start by telling us how you first came to be associated with the CSEG?

BE: The CSEG. . of course, it was after I moved to the Research Department from Dawson Creek because. . .I guess I might have been a member of the CSEG in Dawson Creek but being that far away I wasn't active, I just was on the roster and I'm not even positive of that. But when I arrived here, my first activity after joining the CSEG was to be Publicity Chairman, which was a fairly small job in the organization and I guess that was probably about 1963 or 4. Then I wasn't particularly active for some time after that and then I got involved in more things with the Society.

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But my first major job was Vice-President. Where I became most involved at that time was, and I think about it a lot this year in particular, because it was with the first joint convention with the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists and the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists. And the Vice-President of the CSPG was Bill Ayerton and he and I became close friends and we were both in the same relative position in the two societies. He was with Amoco and I was with Imperial and somewhere along the line it was thought that maybe a joint convention would be a good idea. At that time those sorts of things were initiated largely by the Vice-President.

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We were responsible for the technical programs in the two societies. And while we were doing that job of Vice-President, we decided well, okay, we will co-chair the first joint convention in 1975. And we did. It turned out to be a wonderful success with considerable profit but what makes me think about it today, is we were the first convention to be held in the Calgary Convention Centre and here we are 25 years later the World Petroleum Congress is the first convention to be held in the expanded convention centre so I can kind of relate to what's going on there. It perhaps wasn't as big as the World Petroleum Congress, but I wouldn't be surprised that it. . . if fact, I'm quite certain that it produced more results than the World Petroleum Congress does.

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#033 DF: So that's a busy job then, isn't it for a year?

BE: It was a big job. I guess it took up pretty much, the best part of a couple of years. We worked well together. We had very good committees. In every position we had a geophysicist and a geologist. I still have, I think. . we advertised this sort of around the world and one of the things we did was we created an advertising film, which not only advertised the convention but we merged it with a City of Calgary film and we did it at Channel 7 over there in Rideau, when they used to have. . and maybe they still have a broadcasting facility over there. But Bill and I went there to do our first video, well it was on film, we didn't have video in those days, it was actually a film, and we sent that to all the affiliated societies pretty much around the world. I still have it in fact, a copy of it. We just basically put the front end on it and it was kind of a fun experience.

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DF: What was the content of that?

BE: Just promoting the convention and the content of the rest of it was promoting Calgary as a convention destination. I don't know the attendance we had but it was a very big convention. In those days, Don Getty was the keynote speaker, when he was Minister of Energy for the province. We had a good time with that.

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#051 DF: Let's talk about some of the highlights of your year as President in 1976, anything stand out from that year for you in particular?

BE: Well, I guess yes, it does. In fact that whole stage in my career stands out. That was during the time of great turmoil because of the National Energy Program and the increased royalty program of the Alberta government. As a result of that, not only was work difficult, in that the royalty structures were always changing, therefore the economics of anything you pursued was always changing. With regards to the society, after increasing the royalties and the National Energy Program controlling the prices, the industry was having a very difficult time, and particularly in my role in the CSEG, as President at that time, we had a lot of joint tasks force and meetings with government officials. I remember the one I worked with most closely, was the Deputy Minister of Energy at the time, was Michael Day.

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They were in the process initially of. . .well, activity dropped off completely, so in order to try to increase activity, the provincial government introduced geophysical or seismic incentives, whereby if you shot certain miles of data, the incentive would be that your costs would be reduced by an incentive program of so much a kilometre or mile. Then as that progressed and activity was built up then there was a move to reduce incentives. They were tinkering and fine tuning the whole operation, controlling it, pulling levers here and there at both the federal and provincial levels to make you do more or do less or whatever they happened to think was the appropriate level of activity. So we were very much involved in that and then when it came on the federal side, of course, there was the National Energy Program and there was incentives there too to drill.

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And in those years, it went from sort of sublime to ridiculous, where you could make more money by drilling a hole than not drilling a hole, because you could write off, in the case of the Beaufort, 200% I think it was or maybe more, of the cost of drilling a well, so the more you spent the less it cost. Which was completely asinine and some people took advantage of that in a way that was not intended. Both on the geophysical side and . . . because if you shot enough miles of seismic cheaply enough you could make money whether you ever used it. Hopefully those people were in the minority, who exploited the idea to that degree. But it was a trying time and as a result we on the CSEG executive were often called upon, by reporters or by the government to . . . okay, what's wrong, how come this isn't happening, what should we do and we'd have task forces to try to address that.

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#089 DF: So it was both levels of government and the NEP didn't come until 1980, so you're talking about when Lougheed was first and the province and the feds were fighting over the price and . . .

BE: That's right, the royalty level and the price.

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DF: So they were doing things and then coming to you for reaction?

BE: Yes. Reaction and to be on task forces. Or we were going to them and saying, this has got to change. The NEP I guess, was in 1980, but prior to that, during 1976, throughout that whole period, there was this constant interaction between the two governments. On the one hand Alberta was increasing the royalties at that time, which meant we couldn't afford to work for that amount of net back. And then when the Alberta government increased royalties, the federal government realized that meant they were getting less because they were getting less taxes, because the companies were making less and that's what led to the NEP. So I'm not sure who should take the responsibility for the debacle that we had but I think they both should share it. So in many respects, it was an exciting time but we were getting hammered from all directions. And the executive, probably for a period of about five years, was impacted very much by that. It was a good experience I guess, in hindsight, to be able to work with people of power in government and try to convince them what might help the economy more.

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DF: So as the President of the CSEG, did you do a lot of that the year you were President?

BE: Yes. I probably worked on that sort of thing several hours a week, mostly on weekends. Another I guess, highlight too, it was an interesting adjunct to the whole thing, as President of the CSEG I was on the Canadian Geo-Science Council, which was an interesting effort to coordinate the efforts of geo-science organizations across the country, to foster geo-sciences in Canada. That was another area, sort of outside the industry in a sense, outside of the CSEG, that was interesting. I also was involved in the SEG as a

result of that and that was very interesting. I became Chairman of the continuing education function of the SEG, which was interesting to me, given my background and my interest and involvement in the Canadian Society, which at that time and still is I believe, the second largest section of the SEG. It might even be the largest section now, I don't know. But that connection with the international society was a highlight too. I got to know and enjoyed a lot of the people who were involved in different sections throughout the world. So we had a very closely knit group at that time.

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#130 DF: The SEG came to Calgary in '77, the year after you were President. There must have been a lot of planning going on when you were President.

BE: There was.

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DF: What did you do?

BE: Well, I didn't have to do a lot because, you know, the way those functions work, you have the Chairman of the convention, who . . . maybe you know, I can't remember who that was now. The Chairman of that and just like our joint convention was, they're so capable, basically they would report to the Society executive and budget and that type of thing. And they were also reporting to the SEG, more so, because the SEG was the one that was responsible for it in the end. We were basically providing a service. At that time, the local section did all the work basically. Soon after that the SEG developed, basically a permanent convention team, some of whom were permanent employees of the SEG and they still operate in that function. So the local section, which is going to be . . . it's going to be here again this year, the local section does a lot of work and the committee is very important, but the headquarters of the SEG takes on a lot of the responsibilities and they get most of the revenue as well. So I guess that's appropriate. So having the SEG, yes, it was a responsibility I had but it wasn't a big issue because the committee basically ran it and they would report to the SEG and the CSEG executive. It would be rare that we would have to intervene to any extent at all.

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DF: Do you remember anything of the social scene in the year you were President, any stories about the golf or the tennis or anything?

BE: I'm not much of a golfer but most of the President's were. It did give me a foothold into the Doodlebug golfing, which I did end up attending for several years afterward. In fact, I kept going until I got a trophy. That was my goal, so I finally won a very low level flight. Another thing that I do remember is something that I enjoyed more than golfing was tennis, so I had someone organize a tennis tournament, which did carry on for 5 or 10 years after that, which was a lot of fun. I think it's gone by the wayside. And some of the Doodlebug curling was interesting. So those were interesting.

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Always the highlight, I think, of the year was the Annual Meeting. During my time as

President, the Annual Meeting was definitely the highlight of the year and in fact, it was the best attended and every one was certain to be there. I think things have changed a little bit, with more and more working spouses and less time available. In those days the organization was much more socially active I guess. I think that society and work habits and so on, the balancing act of families and so on, has made it a little more difficult.

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Also I think in those days, that's 25 years ago, there was a lot closer rapport among the members. In those days there was much more loyalty of employees and employers in every business and that applied to them as well. So it was a much more closely knit society and profession than I perceive it to be now, which is unfortunate I think, but I guess that's the price of progress or something.

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#180 DF: Well, I would propose to you that your generation probably have lived in sort of the hey day of the petroleum industry, I mean many people who are doing now what you did, they have to have two incomes just to make ends meet. The petroleum industry is producing a whole lot more with a whole lot fewer people and relying on technology and whole lot of other. . . .

BE: That's true. I don't think there was a better time to be in the business. I try to rationalize that the people in it now probably have much different goals and much different measures of satisfaction than we had. The technology no doubt, is probably more exciting, it certainly is advanced over what we had. But yes, there was no question, that we had a lot more room for error in our day than they do now, you can't afford to be drilling dry holes or strat holes. It's just not possible, the economics don't stand it. But I think there's a lot of good things. I'm sure they must have different measures of satisfaction now than we had then. But we had a good time. Yes, it was probably the best time to be in the business.

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DF: What stands out from your association with the CSEG, what stands out in your mind?

BE: The people is what stands out and that's the part I missed the most when I first retired. Not just the people in the society but business contacts and meetings with people and I think that's probably pretty common. It was a great bunch.

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DF: Any regrets, any thing you'd like to have done in your career you didn't get to do?

BE: No. I'd probably try to do it better. Mistakes were made but no, I don't really have any regrets but I think I could have done it better now, smarter. Too late smart.

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DF: Oh no, it sounds like you did quite well. Well, on behalf of the CSEG and the Petroleum Industry Oral History Project, I'd like to thank you so very much for taking the time to meet with us today and allow us to record your recollections. Thank you very much.

6 W. D. Bill Evans - CSEG Presidency

May 2000

BE: You're welcome.