

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Emily Hemstock

INTERVIEWER: W. J. Wood

DATE: June 1984

JW: This is June 26th, 1984. My name is Jim Wood and I'll be interviewing Mrs. Emily Hemstock at her home in Calgary. This is tape 1, side 1. Emily I wonder if we could start this morning by finding out a little bit about yourself, perhaps where you were born and even when and your maiden name especially.

EH: I was born Emily Keeley on the 8th of July, 1919 in Claresholm, Alberta and grew up there and in Banff and in Nanton and then I came to Calgary to finish schooling and to work for a grain company in 1939.

JW: How did you end up in Banff for awhile, what were your parents doing?

EH: My father was a grocer and he had the Magnet Store in Banff and we lived there for four years, from 1926 through 1929. And my biggest memory of that is going to the opening of what is now the Banff Springs Hotel. I just had a trip up there and was able to relive the historical things going on up there for the hotel, I remember a lot of the opening. My mother subjected us to a lot of culture and we went concerts and my father, being a grocer, got contracts that supplied the work crews up there, so it's very vivid, all those things.

#019 JW: Was that a fun place to grow up at that time, in Banff?

EH: Yes, I think so. Certainly my mother never liked it. The days were short, she had to shovel coal in the furnace and there wasn't as much wind then as now. My father had to have somebody come shovel snow off the roof routinely in the winter.

JW: Which isn't done today.

EH: No. And I remember the mushrooms on the top of the fenceposts. I also remember that we had to have very high fences around the garden area of the yard because the deer would come in and eat your garden. I guess now, nobody has gardens, or maybe there aren't so many deer in town, I don't know. I can remember seeing the odd moose going back and forth to school.

JW: The odd bear.

EH: Not really. We used to go out to the dump, everybody went to the dump. But I really don't remember any bears in town, I just remember. . . when we first lived there we lived in a house next to the government barns because all the public works was done by horses. I can remember hearing the horses moving, you know, when they were sleeping. The house that we rented was owned by Jim Boyce's mother. She had dog teams and he was a guide for years up there and they lived in a little house on the back of the lot, so when we were little we used to get lots of rides on the dog team, which was always a real thrill. We only had one pair of skis, one pair of snowshoes and of course, the boys always took it.

Miss Mutchton??? taught me to skate, her father had the museum there and I believe she's still alive. She had MS I think. But we used to have a skating rink at the front of the school. It was. . . well, I was grade two to grade five, so it wasn't all that bad.

JW: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

EH: I have three brothers and two sisters, I'm the second eldest. My father had a. . . he started off in the Union Bank when he came out from Ontario and said that if he hadn't had the banking training during the Depression that he'd have gone bankrupt like all his friends in the grocery business. Many of them shot their heads off. I remember when we first moved to Nanton, it was right after the crash and there were a lot of suicides, I wasn't very old, grade five. Nobody ever talked to me about what happened, but I remember one morning, early, early, the whole family woke up because of this bright light and we lived just one house from a field, a straw stack was on fire and somebody had not been able to take it anymore and had crawled in and shot himself and set fire to the straw stack. A lot of people who grew up had lost their fathers and now we're hearing that they had committed suicide but in those days, of course, nobody ever told our generation.

#054 JW: Well, after Banff then, you moved down to Calgary?

EH: To Nanton.

JW: To Nanton and when did you . . . ?

EH: After I finished high school, I came up to Business School in Calgary.

JW: Business School, that's what I was going to ask. At SAIT at that time?

EH: No, no I went to Hepburn's Business College, where they trained everybody to be a court reporter. So we were very well trained and then I got a job with a marvelous man, Mr. Collin and he chewed snoose??? and he dictated at about five words a minute. And he never checked anything I ever typed. But I was there until I went to Norman Wells in 1945 and that's what. . . I went up on July 6th, 1945.

JW: Let's talk about that for a bit. How did you get enticed to go up there in the first place.

EH: Just a real fluke. A friend of mine worked in the Pioneer Grains, she was over 40 and she phoned me at the office one Saturday morning and just said, have you applied for that job, just like as if I'd been talking about it. And I said, oh what job is this. During the war I could always go in and say to the people I worked for and say, look I've got a chance at a job here and it was worth a raise, maybe \$5 a month, it was a lot of money. So she had been down to Selective Service they called it, and Sid Weller was interviewing people, they wanted two girls to go north. She was too old, they didn't want to take anybody over 40. I don't know whether that was for medical reasons. . . I don't know. Anyway, I went . . . we worked until noon on Saturday in those days, and I phoned them and made the appointment and went down and interviewed and he gave me a test. In the beginning it was just a very casual thing, but by the time I took that test, I wanted that job so badly I could taste it and I couldn't read my shorthand, I couldn't type, I couldn't do anything. But he hired me anyway.

#078 JW: How come you wanted the job so bad, was he a good salesman or you just got interested in the. . . ?

EH: No, I had a diamond ring I wanted to give back and I wanted to make sure it stayed. So that was just . . . and I only had it a week. I just knew that I wanted to give it back and

make sure that it stayed. So it was just like an answer to a prayer I hadn't said yet that this job came up. So he said, could I be ready to go in ten days and go for a year. I sure could. I had to go back and find out if Alberta Grain would release me because I had just had six week holiday with full pay and had been east to visit all my father's relatives, had been in Cleveland for V-E Day, that's the time it was. Anyway they said, yes I could go. I bought clothes for a year, beautiful hiking boots, can you imagine, which I give to somebody one time because they had never been worn. Nobody told me that I should take a lot of summer clothes, going in July. They didn't tell me that you swam in the Bosworth Creek and maybe take a bathing suit.

JW: What did Sid Weller tell you?

EH: Just basically what the job was. That you would live in . . . well, actually we . . . I went in with Nora Garland and we lived in a launch bay, which was a building put together with very few nails, it had sort of a tarp floor. And in the summer time with no night, the sun shining on it all the time. Your beds and your chairs would sink in the floor. But we were two girls to a room. But he had said, you know, well maybe if you took two summer dresses that that would be adequate. Maybe he didn't know that they swam in the Bosworth Creek. The job was very dull. I just typed invoices. When I had been outside I had worked for . . . actually A.P. Construction branch of the Alberta Pacific Grain and all during the war we had built all those temporary units used for grain storage. Units which are still standing, 40 years later.

JW: You built them?

EH: Well, A.P. Construction. That was my job, was to do the books and the typing and the orders and all of those things.

JW: So a good variation.

EH: Oh yes. And I would rather. . . you know, in those days, I would rather work late and keep a finger on what the job was rather than have someone come in and you wouldn't know whether it was done or. . . So then I went north and all I did was type invoices.

#112 JW: So did you even know where Norman Wells was?

EH: Oh yes. Because with the building of the Canol Project, many of my friends, who were not eligible to get into the services, had gone to work on the Canol line. So I knew a lot of people from there. And I didn't really know any [very quiet mumbling]???

JW: So in ten days you . . .

EH: Well, then I got to Edmonton. And in those days, you could be bumped any place and we were in Edmonton for a week, just sitting around in a hotel, which was certainly something I was never accustomed to. And Nora Garland and I, and Sally Hinchell, was supposed to go in there also. And we went to Edmonton and they discovered that they had hired one girl too many. And Sally's mother had. . . she was from Rosthern, Saskatchewan, she phoned up to Imperial's office and said, she was coming to see Sally and so Mr. Weller said, that's fine, she can stay until her visit with her mother. He didn't know that Mrs. Hinchell never stayed more than an hour, she just. . . so Sally didn't get in until I came out. She subsequently married Jack Hardy. And Nora Garland went in on that flight and Bob Haddy???, and Jack Brown, Bob Cowan and Mrs. Walker Taylor and her two children and their dog and Doris McRae, Don Macrae's wife and their little boy, Kenny. A DC-3. . . I suppose it would normally have taken about 10 hours to go in. But we went

to Fort St. John and Fort Nelson, we had engine trouble. I think it was Fort Nelson where there was an American army base or an airman's base and we were there for hours while they brought in another part. By this time that little Kenny McCrae was so dirty, she'd been through every bit of clothing she had in the suitcase for him, had started him off in this little sailor suit to greet his dad. He was mix and match when he got there. We got in around 12:30, in July, no night. This was . . . you know, the whole thing was just like a dream, still is. And the river was about 4 miles wide then and it was just like you'd left the whole world behind you because from then on until we came out we really had very little contact with the outside.