

PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY
OIL SANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

BERT MACKAY STUDIED RISK MANAGEMENT AND POWER ENGINEERING IN THE UK AND CAME TO CANADA IN 1966 WHERE HE QUICKLY OBTAINED WORK WITH ALBERTA POWER (NOW EPCOR). HE BEGAN WORK WITH GCOS/SUNCOR IN FEBRUARY 1967 ON THE MINE/EXTRACTION SIDE AND WORKED THERE UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT. HE WORKED THROUGH THE RANKS TO BECOME MANAGER OF TRAINING ON THE MINING SIDE OF OPERATIONS EVENTUALLY ALSO BECOMING RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFETY. AFTER RETIREMENT IN 1995, HE UNDERTOOK CONSULTING WORK FOR VARIOUS COMPANIES. IN 1997, HE JOINED THE OILS SANDS INTERPRETIVE CENTRE AS ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND RAISED \$2.6 MILLION FOR RENOVATIONS. HE WORKED AT THE CENTRE UNTIL 2005.

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: August 31st [should be May 31st], 1939, at Inverness, Scotland

Date and Place of Interview: 2:00 pm, May 31st, 2012, the residence of Bert McKay (see below)

81 Grosvenor Boulevard
St. Albert, AB T8N 0X9
Tel. 780- 418-3205
Email bertmackay@shaw.ca

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



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



Name of Videographer: Jimmy Bustos

Consent form signed: Yes Initials of Interviewer: AD

Last name of subject: MCKAY

AD: My name is Adriana Davies, and I'm a researcher/interviewer on the Petroleum History Society Oil Sands Oral History Project. It is the 31st of May of 2012, and I'm interviewing Bert MacKay. Bert, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for this important project. Can you tell me your date of birth and where you were born, and also then a three-minute summary bio and then we'll get into the specifics of your involvement with the oil sands, after that.

BM: Okay. Thank you Adriana. I was born in Inverness, in Scotland, on the 31st of May 1939. I was the oldest of six children. I come from a military family, going way back to the Boer War. During the war years and shortly after I was born in '39, I was essentially brought up by my grandparents, because my dad was away in the Royal Air Force until 1946, so we didn't see a lot of him, except when he came home on leave once in a while. My mother seemed to put on weight and within a few months I seemed to have another brother or sister. However, they were very good years with my grandparents, and my Grandfather brought me up in a very disciplined way. I learned everything about the military, he taught me how to shoot at the age of twelve, and all that good stuff, and I went through at Beaulieu school, a junior secondary school, followed by a one of the classic schools in Inverness, the Inverness Royal Academy, and got my classic education. From there, I went into risk management, both with an insurance company and then went down to London, England, and took power engineering. So essentially, that's about the first part of my life, before I tied the knot with a beautiful young lady in 1964, and in 1966 we decided to emigrate to Canada.

AD: So this is where your Canadian story begins.

BM: The Canadian story begins in 1966. We decided when coming to Canada not to fly. We had the choice of either the plane or the ship, so we thought we're going to take a cruise, and when my sister-in-law heard that, she said, "I'm going too." So Angela, my wife's sister—my wife's name is Caroline—she's a journalist by profession, we ended up with three plus our young son was only a few months old at that time. So we headed out on the *Empress of England* on April 6th of 1966 for Canada, for Quebec City, Montreal and Quebec City. Eventually, we ended up in Alberta. Now I should have mentioned that I had a job offer before I left Scotland, with Alberta Power, so I was already one of those immigrants who had a job, which was great. So immediately, within several weeks, I was at work with Alberta Power, in 1966. Now being the junior man with Alberta Power, running a power station, they said, "Well, we want to put you up north."





When I looked at the map, I said, “Well, where’s north; well, there’s north. Where do you want me to go?”

“We want you to go up to Rainbow Lake.”

“Where’s Rainbow Lake?” It wasn’t on the map. I had to get another map, and said, “Oh my God, this is Edmonton. Way up north.” Well, we’ve got our young son—a few months old—Rainbow Lake, it’s really essentially in the Arctic, Northwest Territories, to work with Aquitaine, and run the power station for Aquitaine. I said, “Boy,” and I don’t know then if the magic fairy came around, but in my mailbox was a flyer for employment in Fort McMurray for Great Canadian Oil Sands. And on December the 12th of 1966, I went for an interview in Edmonton and coincidentally, as I’m driving to Edmonton, over the radio came the announcement that Dr. Karl Clark had passed away. Now he was just a name to me at that point, and when I had my interview with Glen Andrews and Bob Thompson of Great Canadian Oil Sands, I said, “By the way, I just heard on the radio that Dr. Clark had passed away.” It immediately froze the interview, as they knew him very well. He had been a consultant to GCOS.

So, I got a job offer, within two hours, and given the references and the credentials, and they set me up to liaison, to start work on February 13th of 1967. However, with my power engineering ticket, if there’s a problem in a power station, you cannot leave arbitrarily, you must stay. Otherwise, you could lose your ticket. So I ended up being several days late up there, because there was a power outage in Valleyview at that time. But the company ... Alberta Power treated me exceptionally well, very, very well, and we still keep in touch, even with my old boss from way back. So the story is that on February 15th, 1967, I travelled to Fort McMurray, and we stayed in the camp, and that was the first of 28 and some odd years of work with Suncor Energy. Great years, and I don’t know where they all went, but the company again, over the years, treated me very well, and I was involved in a whole range of things.

I started in the new operations in extraction. We did have the manuals, the operating manuals, written by the Bechtel Corporation, but this was a new venture based on Dr. Karl Clark’s lab experiments. Little did Dr. Clark know that when we scaled up the plant to a commercial scale we encountered a host of new problems that occurred. Now, it started in the mine. GCOS, which is otherwise known as “Gone Crazy Over Sand” or “Great Clouds of Steam” [laughter], bought two bucket wheels in Germany. Mr. Peter Biel, our chairman engineer, went to Germany, negotiated the purchase, and brought them back. They were assembled. The only thing was that these bucket wheels dug coal in the Ruhr Valley. When you transpose something from coal to oil sands—the abrasive quality of the oil sands—it’s a little bit different from coal. In fact, on a scale from one to 10, coal’s about a four on the Rockefeller scale, and the oil sands is about a seven, because it’s made





up of quartz sand. Quartz sand has got a very angular grain to it. So the first thing that happened was the bucket wheel teeth didn't last more than 24 hours, so every day we were changing huge—each one of them weighed 40 kilos. Each tooth, and there were 24 teeth, weighed 40 kilos each. So they all had to be changed. It meant that one day we operated and the next day we were changing teeth for the bucket wheel. Now these were things that were a huge learning curve that we were going on. The project was planned to operate at 4,500 tonnes per hour, with two bucket wheels alternately operating, and it produced 45,000 barrels of bitumen daily. That was the plan.

Unfortunately, it took quite a bit of time to get to that point. However, we learned a lot. Sometimes we called it the GCOS two-step—three steps forward and two steps back. When it appeared we were getting ahead and we were making more production, suddenly the bucket wheels would go down. So in summary, when I look back at what were the main problems in those days, the problems occurred in the mine and in the utilities plant, that's the powerhouse. We had as many as 12 power outages on any given day—some days more than that. The lights are on today, but an hour from then the lights are out. And when I say lights, I mean power. The power is down. Without power we couldn't operate the plant site.

There was a big learning curve in the powerhouse. For one simple reason: the fuel for the powerhouse was coke. Now, coal coke is soft and easy and it's got no residue; whereas the coke that was derived from the bitumen, when it was de-coked in the cokers and used as fuel, had a number of resins in it. These resins stuck to the tubes of the boilers—large, large boilers—four times the height of this house. Because of that, the tubes got hot and they burned a hole, and of course the boilers went down. When the boilers went down, the turbo generators went down and the lights went out. So we got to a point that everybody, even in the daytime, wore a flashlight [laughter], which outsiders said, "Why are you wearing a flashlight at 12 noon?" Because if you're inside a plant and the lights go out (we don't have windows like in a house), the lights go out and it's certainly dangerous at that point. So we learned a lot along the way and we improvised.

Now one of the things I should mention was in those days we had a lot of local people from the farming community working there. Many of them didn't have what you might call, in many cases didn't have a high school education or in fact post-secondary education, but I'll tell you something they were the best improvisers that I ever met. If you wanted something going, and you weren't too worried about the safety aspects of it, you get a farmer. And I often thought, if all these farmers were around today, I would shake every one of their hands, because we were able to get this plant running. And in today's context you'd have to go through a host of paperwork and do it right, under the OH and S requirements, and it was high risk, and we would never do that today. But in those days we were anxious to get the plant going, we took a lot of risks. Until such time as engineers come in with a revision to the plant, it ... we improvised.





AD: Can you give me an example?

BM: Well, one of the things that we improvised was the, in pumping, we had to be very careful because, again, with the abrasive nature of this material, it wore out pumps sometimes in 48 hours. The engineers would come along and say, "No, that pump's got a new impeller. It must be good."

"No, it's not pumping."

"Change the gauge. It's a pressure gauge, change the gauge." Still not pumping. The engineer wouldn't believe it.

We'd say, "Sorry, it's simply not pumping."

Ourselves, we'd shut down the pump and the engineer would come along and say, "No, there's got to be another problem." So we spent a lot of time telling engineers that the real problem was the abrasiveness of the oil sands. We would bring in other pumps or portable pumps to try and get the system going again. So after a while, the learning curve was not only the operations people but the engineers. Because the engineers come in from university with their certificate on their sleeve: "I'm an engineer. I know everything." So sorry, but follow us around first of all. Keep asking questions, but this is a new process. Never been done on this scale before, and we are all learning. We are all learning. So it became a huge learning curve. A lot of frustrations; if one shift made a mistake, the other shift came on and there was a bit of a heated discussion, shall I say, between the two. But after a while we realized we had to work as a team, and I was very fortunate to work with some very good people. You know, at that time. We did manage to document, solve, one step at a time, all of the problems. Now in the intervening years, the first two years from '67 onwards the world oil price, when we started, was \$3 a barrel. \$3 a barrel, that was the world oil price, and I remember that specifically because our hourly pay rate was \$3.25 an hour. Okay? And we thought we were in the money. We are definitely in the money.

The good thing that the company had done for us, which I should have mentioned, was to supply housing. So that was an excellent plan. There were no houses. There was only 2,300 people up there. There was no additional housing, so the company did supply housing on a non-marketable basis. In other words, you couldn't speculate, by getting a house and selling it. If you sold a house, it had to be returned back to the company. And, obviously, to prevent speculation. So it was variable to pick and choose our own homes, in downtown Fort McMurray, and as it turned out over the years, we all got to know each other. We all lived within a few blocks of each other.

Franklin Avenue, in the centre of Fort McMurray, was a sea of mud, in the spring of 1967, and my wife and other neighbours, other wives, went to shop for groceries in a track vehicle. So rubber



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



boots, track vehicle, go down for a bag of groceries, down to the supermarket and then come back, until such time as the place dried up and we could use our vehicles. Highway 63 was less than one lane north and south. There was no shoulder at all, so that was very, very difficult. It was quite an adventure getting to Edmonton. Some days, it would take you 12 hours to get from Fort McMurray to Edmonton.

We had no radio station. We had no TV. Well, you could get a bit of radio if you had a Sony radio with a high antenna, like my friend George had, a high antenna. You could faintly get 630 CHED, but there was no radio station in Fort McMurray until 1972, and then OK radio came from Vancouver, and we had our first radio station then. And then shortly after that, ABC Cable, now Shaw Cable, came in, and it gave us two hours of TV every evening from seven 'til nine, but, except, it was a week old. It was in the can. It was a videotape. So we saw a hockey game that occurred two weeks ago or a week ago. However, it was TV, and it was black and white. And we all had small Zeniths, until such time as we got cable about 10 years after that. In terms of isolation, we were slowly getting to the point where we were able to see what was happening in the outside, apart from getting the newspaper and learning from that.

AD: I'm going to ask, when you started in April of '67, what was your title and what were your job responsibilities?

BM: My title was Senior Technician at the plant site. In other words, I was operating equipment on several floors, and then eventually it moved on in a progression to the control panel, so it was operating the control room.

AD: So you would have been part of the Union or the company's bargaining committee and eventually ...

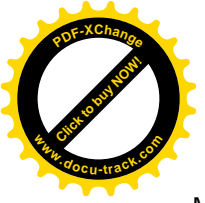
BM: Well, it's interesting you ask that question. I was Secretary of the Union.

AD: So tell me about that.

BM: We formed a ... We wanted to form an association. Not because anybody was, you know, had radical union thoughts. But there was so much disorder within the plant site in terms of the operation, and people put in all sorts of petitions that we really wanted order. And the only way we could have order was with a collective agreement. So we decided to form a local bargaining association with the company. We weren't really sure where the company was going, when you knew that we could barely form a profit, so we decided to form a bargaining unit association. Great Canadian Oil Sands Employees Bargaining Association, GCOSEBA. That eventually morphed into



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



McMurray Independent Oil Workers, MIOW. Eventually, following that, it became eventually what it is today, a branch of an international union, the CEP: Communication, Energy, and Paperworkers union. But I was Secretary of the Union for about two and a half years. And being kind of young and immature up to a point, we were somewhat maybe a little bit radical and felt that the company's got to be making money.

The company wasn't making money, and what we didn't know at the time was that there was a risk that the plant would have been shut down. And it took all of 10 years before the company made more than \$1 million. And that we learned later, not earlier. We always felt that the company must be making money someplace, but then later on when word came from Philadelphia, who kept pouring money into the plant. John Howard Pew was still around, and he said "No, I made a commitment to that plant site. I put the first 100 million in, and then the corporation—it went up as much as \$900 million. But he said, "We are not going to shut it down now. It's too much impact on the town. We've got housing. It would be disastrous to do that." So it was only his persuasion that kept it going until roughly 1978, when the very first, the company announced on their audit sheet \$1 million. Well, today that's petty cash, but it was \$1 million and it was a profit.

And then in 1980, after that, the company decided to expand the plant slightly, because they knew if we could get a little bit more production, small capital, we would gain. It's the old unit basis cost. So they did in fact expanding the plant. We called it three operating lines. They put in a fourth. And then they were talking about a fifth line as well. So the operation increased; they had good knowledge of the bucket wheels at that point. We had good engineering and maintenance on them. It was very costly. For example, it took three people to run a bucket wheel versus a shovel today only takes one. Electric shovels. So these were kind of the precarious times where we weren't really sure where we were going. And the turnover at that time of people . . . , because that was part of my duties. We were recruiting people, and we had as many as 40 percent turnover in people in that first two years. People we trained today, in the first two months they were gone. Some people it was due to domestic circumstances. The wife could get no job or she didn't like the isolation, and they didn't stay. They went away. But the hard core stayed, and these were the people that we have today that stayed and retired and formed the retiree club. So it took 10 years.

Now, let me go into the community, if that's okay. I wanted to have a word about the community. Elections come up at the municipal level, and we nominated two people to get into the city hall. And one of them, in fact, my good friend Bill Gendreau, went into City Hall, became Deputy Mayor, and went into four or five elections and got voted in every single time. Another gentleman that came in ran the local gas station, he ran the Sunoco gas station, that was owned by Sun Oil, because they wanted to maintain a low price of gas in the town, and there was a bit of speculation going on,



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



so they built a Sunoco gas station. His name was Keith McLeod, and Keith got on City Council as well. So we had Bill and Keith as spokespersons for many of us on there, and that went very well.

I was appointed onto the Economic Development Council, with the company's permission, and we had meetings with the ... made various plans and helped to develop downtown. Some people were starting to build homes way out in the countryside, and the government did not like that. They said, "No, we've got to maintain the strength of downtown." So we did. It meant contact with all the business community, and I was a bit uncomfortable with all that, because everybody was starting to speculate a little bit, and speculation meant the costs were going up. But in fact, it worked out fine to the point when a family called the Jean family came in from B.C. and from back east. In fact, the current Member of Parliament is Brian Jean. His mother was the one who brought the family in at that time, and they, she chaired the Downtown Business Revitalization committee. I was on that for some time, and then moved on to other committees after that.

At the same time, Keyano College, which started as a vocational centre in 1965 in Lac La Biche was then relocated to Fort McMurray in modular homes, ATCO trailers, and eventually the government agreed that it's probably the right time to build a proper college, and they advanced I think it was about \$3 to \$4 million in those days, multiplied by ten today, I guess, but they built the college and Keyano College was formed. And my wife went to work in the executive suite in Keyano, and in fact outlasted three or four presidents there. And she started the newsletter, ended up doing from recruitment of staff, as you do in a very small college, you do multiple tasks. So that became very well.

Now, to go back to the plant site. One of the problems that we had that we felt was a disservice to First Nations. We had very, very few First Nations on the plant site. There was a few hired, both Métis and First Nations, but it was low numbers. And the ones who'd applied ... we wanted to be more proactive. We went to Keyano College and worked out a program with them to bring in Aboriginals from the reserves, give them some preliminary orientation, and then get them to work. We had mixed success with it, because we didn't really have ... It was not their fault, but the fact is we had mixed experience in dealing with, shall I say, a different culture. Put it that way. But we wanted some success, so we did end up putting them into a branch of the plant site, increasing our training, and putting other Aboriginal leaders in charge, and that worked out very well. And that model is in place today. With my friend Dave Tuccaro, who's got 300 Aboriginals in his company and he's got a \$300 million a year business. So that worked out very well. Not the stuff you read in the paper. You won't see it appear. They don't want to print that stuff. But anyway, we were really serious from '76 on about the native training program. And some of them stayed and became





supervisors and then retired from Suncor, and I've met them on the trail, met them in Edmonton at hockey games, and they were very happy that they got their first chance there.

Now, when you fast forward to '77, '78, things were happening in Newfoundland. Unemployment rose to huge, 40, 45 percent, and another thing happened in Fort McMurray. Syncrude construction was ongoing from '74, and Syncrude started in '78. So everybody from Newfoundland arrived in Fort McMurray. When you ask, what time did the Newfies arrive, it was '76, '77, and Syncrude snapped some up for construction, and other ones came into the operation. We got a lot of applicants from the Maritimes. And great people—hard working, and party hard too. But really hard working. The point I'm making here is that the influx from the Maritimes, Ontario, and Quebec, really happened in '77, '78, '79. Thereabouts. When you take a look at the list of employees, you see that Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. You can see all in that list, right near that period of time. We were very glad to have them, and excellent workers, and all the rest of it. None of them had experience in this, but then neither did we.

AD: You learned on the job. Now, in terms of your progress in the company. You started out in extraction, as a technician. How long were there, and what was your next move? Maybe we'll get a sense of the chronology.

BM: No problem. In 1976, the manager of mine extraction, Joe Anderson, came to see me. Actually, he came to see me at home, and said, "Look, with all this turnover and all that, our method of training tends to be a bit haphazard." And he made some compliments to me and said, "Look, I'm appointing a position here. It's not going to competition." I wasn't happy with that. I would have liked a competition. However, he said, "No, there's some urgency to get it going, and I'd like you to take over the position of training supervisor in the extraction area." Which meant moving from Union, moving from the operations on to a day job, and I had kinda mixed feelings about that.

But I said, "Ya, I'll take on the challenge." And that's when I started my long career in training, with first of all extraction. And within a year, I needed another person to help me out. It was getting fairly big, and the staff was increasing the complement. There was more training. There was more safety training. And not only that, there was more regulations coming in. Alberta was then expanding its occupational health and safety regulations. And they were getting very tight. So I started, I think we went up until 1981, with the two of us. And then shortly after that, they threw me into mine and extraction supervision. So I had both departments. So I ended up with about 10 people reporting to me at that point in time.

Now, other projects that came up at the same time. The government came to Suncor and asked for help to redevelop their blue binder, their occupational health and safety binder. Okay. What we call



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



now the GSRs, General Safety Regulations. And I had bit of experience in that, plus I had some risk management certificates from the old country. So I knew all the basics in safety. Not necessarily the practical stuff. But I certainly knew all the theory. Anyway, I was assigned to the government for three months to work in Edmonton with Mr. Miller and John McPherson and a bunch of others in Occupational Health and Safety. And that was a very interesting time. The pace was a lot different than the plant site. [Laughter.] Government people seem to arrive any time. You know, I'm waiting at the door, and the door's locked. Not used to that at all. But anyway, the three months was good. I inputted in. They were very happy with it. I felt there was a wee bit of a conflict of interest. But there was other people working there are well: Dan McClennan, who I met years later in AUPE, was also involved in part of that. And a bunch of other excellent people: Ed Ewasiuk and a few others from Edmonton, who I hadn't met before. And I kept in touch over the years with them. So we did in fact come out with a blue binder, and that was great. So that was one project.

Another project was in the lab. Suncor was upgrading the lab, and I came to see my boss and they wanted my help to redo the progression system in the laboratory and get some training going. So lab training, like medical training, is very specialized. So there was no company in Canada that does lab training. So I had to go to the U.S.A. and get a company called General Physics of Philadelphia to come in, at very high cost. There was two chemistry PhDs in the group, and another gentleman with a chemistry background in instrumentation, and nuclear, because we had nuclear instruments in the lab and that required specialized training in nuclear technology. I had a bit of nuclear as well. But, anyway, we brought them in. Thirty-two people in the lab. That was a four-month project, and they did that.

What I'm illustrating here was I had a whole variety of different jobs to do. Then in Sarnia, which was Sunoco, the branch in Sarnia. They were opening up a what's called catalytic cracking, which was a method invented by a Frenchman called Eugene Houdry, the Houdry System. It's well known. Every refinery in North America uses the Houdry System, with a catalyst. But my job was a bit of risk analysis. So I ended up working with three other people and doing checklists. And when you do a checklist for a refinery, you end up with a book that's about an inch thick in pages, and what you check before you have a preliminary startup and go through the commissioning. So that was another interesting project as well.

Now, the other change that took place in the early '80s was all the instrumentation of every plant, every plant site in Alberta was what we called the old style analog instrumentation. Air driven needles, okay? As opposed to today's screen cathode ray tube (CRT) and digital control, and we now refer to it as digital control. But in those days we did analog, and it was time for the changeover. So, we had some of the older operators who were absolutely scared that there's a new control room and they would lose control and not know how to operate. That was quite a challenge. But we slowly





worked our way through it. We had a number of people who did not want to go on that particular board and froze themselves away from it. But we had some of the younger people, because after all we're now into the digital age and Sony was bringing out some digital stuff. So that was a major, major changeover. Not just for that part of the plant, but we had some people from Syncrude come over as well and study it and saw where we made our mistakes and how not to make a mistake. So that was digital control, and that was a huge changeover. Dow Chemical in Edmonton—we visited their control rooms and we saw what they did and we eliminated some little roadblocks that we saw in Dow Chemical. But that was a major changeover, so the days of the long 30-foot control room, and I have a photograph here for you, is now down to a half. It's now a semi-circle. You sat down with your keyboards right in front of you. And after all, it became much more reliable than the old system

AD: You know what's interesting that it looks like that position as head of training was almost designed for you and you ran with it. Now in terms of ... Can you give me an idea of the range of training modules and the technical areas, the trades that those related to?

BM: Yup, no problem. Well, let me start with basics. The first thing that is done in training is simply a basic orientation for people to make them feel comfortable with the company. Welcome them. Tell them a little bit about the company. Then starting on the basic philosophy in training. Lay it on very heavily. Tell them in no uncertain terms that if you don't work safely, please don't stay here because we would prefer you leave. But if you do stay here, you have to work safely. And there's no such thing as just safety. It's safe production or safe maintenance. Okay? It's not just safety by itself. It's meaningless. So we started with the orientation. As a matter of fact, we got to a point then later on with orientation that we shared it with Syncrude. Syncrude and Suncor sat down at the table together, years before. We've got it of course across all the companies up north. But in those days, the two companies sat down and decided, "Why should somebody work at Suncor and do a four-hour program, go across the road to Syncrude and go through the same four-hour program?" So we agreed to uniform, the uniformity of orientation, and that worked out really well.

Now, then after that you're into different modules. How to wear a Scott Air-Pak, an air pack for getting into tanks, and all that. Then we went into toxic gases, like hydrogen sulphide, nitrogen, atmospheres, confined space—a whole range of different things. How to wear harnesses, if you're going up on towers and all that stuff. Safety instruments—how to detect hydrogen sulphide with an instrument. And we ended up somewhere around 21 different modules in safety. And we ended up with an actual schedule, but it became very, very specialized. The other problem is that safety manufacturers have a habit of changing and upgrading their equipment. So if they did that, and I'm thinking of some of the changes ... for example, Scott Air-Pak, when they brought out Scott Air-Pak originally it came from the aviation industry. They came from the U.S.A, okay? Scott, Scott



Aviation. And their hoses, air hoses, and the fire department knows this; their air hoses would crack at 25 degrees below zero. So we're climbing up towers to check for H₂S—it's your life. And an air line to your mask would crack. Very dangerous. So we had to stop everything, get ahold of Scott Air-Pak, fly the people up from the U.S.A. And they'd say this is terrible, how did it happen? Did anybody ...? No, it cracked, but we've got 25, 30 below. You guys don't down there. So then they remanufactured the hoses and all that. So there's things like that we went through, and it became very difficult.

Then of course, confined space. How do you get into one of the big tanks, do it safely, and come out safely. Okay? And what happens in there? And many of the tanks at any hydrocarbon area are called pyrophoric. Once you open up air to a tank, air and the material inside can ignite spontaneously—no match. So one of the dangers is we have to take samples of a tank, close it up again, test it, and then to see it wasn't a pyrophoric compound that was extremely dangerous. Because after it caught fire, there would be an explosion. And many of the tanks had floating roofs and the dangers were just simply too great.

The other problems were cleaning. Bitumen is a very difficult material to clean. And equipment had to be cleaned using a solvent called Toluene. It's made in Germany and it's called Toluene. It's a chemical that comes all the way from Germany. Anyway, the problem is that not only is it skin sensitive, but it's highly flammable. Regrettably, we had one fatality, through, believe it or not, lack of communication. If there is ever a simple word that explains fatalities, it's communication, or lack of it. And what happened was that a gentleman was working and welding on a bucketwheel, at one level, another gentleman was higher up, getting ready to paint it because to avoid rust, and he was using Toluene, and it fell onto the gentleman who was welding. And I won't go into the details, but I was on shift that day and I will never forget it.

AD: Now what year was that?

BM: That was ... I think that year was ... I was on shift. I think it was '73... '72, '73, thereabouts, and it was the fall, and I'm thinking of the nurses who were in that area, when we recovered the gentleman and all that. And it was the most ... you know, the nightmares I've had about what happened there to that gentleman. And it was simply lack of communication. We had one foreman controlling the cleaning up there, on a higher ramp, and another foreman controlling the welding down here, and neither of the two put together the two of them to say up there there's flammable fluids and down here there's a welder. I mean, it sounds so simplistic, but they failed to communicate with all the paperwork flying around the plant and all the rest of it. The other thing we did was—all of us, George [Skulsky] included—was improve the safe work permit system for that reason. We revised all of it after that. Nobody goes to work without a permit. I doesn't matter who



he is ... electrician, welder, plumber, whoever it is. He gets a permit. So then you know on the board a copy of the permit. He's signed off on it, with the precautions to be taken, safety equipment, and who else is working in that vicinity. So it's unfortunate that a fatality led to improvements, but that's the way things usually happen. Just like airlines. There's an air crash, and you have improvements after that. But we did revise the permit system, and even after that it was revised several times. But we had one of the best permit systems in the whole of Alberta, and the Alberta government wanted the procedures and the copies, and we gladly gave it to them. Because safety is generic. There's no patents on safety. We were glad to share our experience. But the fatality made us all extremely sad. The welder was well known and a family man and everything else ...

AD: Do you want to give his name?

BM: No, no, I don't. But we ... You have to learn from these things, and it's not a blame game. It's a question of how do we move on from here. And not do this again. And it certainly never happened again, any of that type of ... Other fatalities occurred on the plant site, but not one like that. Quite the same ... Just simply lack of communication between two people, all on the same piece of equipment. That was the sad part. But so we did do a lot in terms of safety. And today, the oil sands industry generically if you work it out in terms of injuries and the number of man hours—there are accidents that still happen, they still do—but if you work it out on the thousands of people who work there times the incidents, it's the safest in Canada. It's the safest industry in Canada. There's no doubt about it.

AD: Now you also made some innovation. You brought in video in terms of the training.

BM: Yes.

AD: Do you want to talk about that? When you did that? Who it was, and so on?

BM: Ya, well, because of repetitive training, and the fact that I knew that things that were fairly repetitive, because video to some extent is two dimensional, and it doesn't readily open up to questions. It's not interactive. We did interactive later. But the video ... I brought in Western Cinevision, who came in. But my good friend Dave Ryan, who was Western Cinevision, and we did a bunch of actual video training to tell people how to operate cameras, and especially in things that other people could readily understand. At the time, I didn't quite understand the length of time it would take to make a 10-minute video. I didn't realize there's a factor of 40, by the time you do your script and get agreements and signs offs, and all that stuff. You do it and produce it and edit it. I didn't quite realize that, and a lot of management didn't either. They'd ask for a 10-minute video, and they'd ask for it tomorrow morning. I'd say, "Sorry, we can't do that." [Laughter] But we did ...



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



Dave came in on contract, with Western Cinevision and a couple of other companies I can't recall. But anyway, he showed what could be done, and then, when we had the big training group we said, "Well, Dave, if you're interested." And the company was annoyed because we had already brought Dave into the company. And I believe Dave was hired in '81, '80 or '81, thereabouts—I might be wrong by a year. But Dave come in and was part of our group and made some wonderful safety videos for us. In fact, some of them got to a point where they were plagiarized by other companies, who would get copies. I don't know how they got a copy. But anyway, they used them as well for safety. So we did use video quite a bit, but again we were still, I could see, educating management, which was just as big of a problem as making the video, was telling them that we need three days for a half hour video or a 20-minute video. Three days for a 20-minute ...? You know. Because they'd never done anything like that before and didn't understand the whole process to get it right. They wanted a finished product, all right. But they didn't realize it takes you all that time to do it. So anyway ...

AD: So you were head of training for how many years in all?

BM: Head of training right up until I retired.

AD: Okay, which was when?

BM: '94.

AD: '94.

BM: Ya, I ... But again I was in a lot of special projects. And some of my people were specialists. For example, Mike McDougall was a demolition, an explosives expert. Now, the government had a number of inspectors and safety people. But they had nobody who had any knowledge in the Alberta government who knew anything about explosives. They had read a bit about it, but couldn't do any inspections. So the vice-president called me in one day and said, "Look, I've got a call from the chief inspector, occupational health and safety, the deputy minister as well. And they need some assistance on demolition." Well, we joked about that for a while. What's going to happen in the Leg?

But I said, "Okay. What do they actually need?"

"Well, they've got sixteen inspectors that need training on how to inspect worksites that have explosives." And of course, there's two types of explosives. You've got composite, and you've got molecular. And they're very different.

So I talked to Mike, who was my blasting expert, and Mike said, "Oh fine, will they pay my expenses?"



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



“Oh ya, the government’s going to pay everything down there.” And so Mike was assigned for three months in Edmonton and did exceptionally well. And after three months, in fact, the deputy minister made a trip up to Fort McMurray, because he’d never been up there, and he came to the plant site and he called Mike out in front of the group, give him a nice plaque to thank him for all the help he’d given them down there, because Mike not only was a great trainer but he really knew his stuff. So these are kind of specialist things.

AD: How many trainers did you have, and what were their areas of expertise?

BM: I had twelve. They ranged from operations training to digital control people to an instrument trainer to bucketwheel trainers—people right on the bucketwheels—to other trainers who did heavy equipment, what we called JLGs. That’s the equipment, the guy who sits in the basket and operates. Electricians use them mostly for power lines and all that stuff. And also many of the crawler tractors, what we call Cats nowadays—Caterpillars, and all that stuff. And then we added a few more people later on to help out in heavy duty mechanic material. So quite a group of specialists in their own field. But again, two parts to everything in training. One is the ability to teach people, so there’s a teaching skill. And there’s a knowledge skill. And it was very difficult sometimes to keep people up to date, because mechanics were changing very quickly, especially on heavy equipment.

Now, the heavy haulers is a good example. This company went through heavy haulers from 150 tonne up to 400 tonnes. And every time they brought out new tires, new types of engines, some of the drives were electric; some of the drives were mechanical. You know, how do you get ...? You got to send people out. So sending people out to say, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for three weeks. You know, suddenly, 10 percent of your budget’s gone. So suddenly, I needed a much larger budget. When I had training, the people we had to train in the main safety training centre, we needed a bigger place. And we needed more PA systems, and we needed more video, projectors, video projectors. I needed air conditioning for the building, in July especially, when you’ve got a tin roof. So you had to negotiate and sit down with all these things. The lab project, I had to get a quarter of a million dollars to bring the people in from the U.S. and three great guys, PhDs, knew their stuff inside out, including nuclear—just knew everything. There was never a question they couldn’t answer. So things like that. You know, things started to expand quite a bit in the training field. But it went very well.

The other thing we gradually took on was that people were staying for a longer time at the plant site. We were a little bit afraid in the early years. Turnover was 20, 30 percent. Huge. I mean train people today, and in six months they’re gone. You lose all those skills. Somebody else comes in; you start training all over again. So fortunately, it went down to about roughly 7 and 10 percent, which we could sustain. We also got people with a higher education level. The other thing that happened, in





'86, just before the '87 fire, which we'll talk about. But in '86, we got ... the company got a call from occupational health and safety to say that WHMIS, W-H-M-I-S, Workplace Hazardous Material Information System, was a federal-provincial safety regulatory thing coming in, which is going to be huge. And everybody has to be trained in it, like everybody, including the cooks. And there had to be a written exam—no verbal. The government had laid this down. I said, "Well, that's funny. The company ... the government doesn't normally tell you how to train. I'll give you the material."

"No, this is what this is all about, and we're requiring written training."

So, I was grabbed on day, a Thursday I think it was, and said, "You're going to Ottawa. (No, start in Ottawa.) Yes, start in Ottawa. Thursday—you're going to Ottawa Friday."

"Oh, I'm going to the hockey."

"No, forget the hockey. We'll pay for your ticket, but you're going to Ottawa."

And it was a meeting with the feds on Bill C, it was a Conservative, Bill C something—I can't remember the C number—that was being introduced and there was a meeting after that. They wanted to fast track this whole training throughout the West. They had already done a little bit of a test in Ontario and worked out some of the kinks on it. So to cut a long story short, they introduced this WHMIS regulation. The federal part of it, which was kind of the grandfather clause. Mandated the provinces, who accepted it readily. Then we were forced with understanding what it was all about. And then, of course, training everybody up. So it was a major, major business. So I had to drop everything. I was in the middle of projects, but I had some good people, so I dropped that. We spent a month in Edmonton with Occupational Health and Safety. Got WHMIS, which was going to be introduced in October of 1988. That was the plan down the road. Now, so I'm backtracking here a little bit to '86.

The other thing that happened in '86 was we had a strike. Suncor's biggest strike ever—five months and 13 days. So we got all these wonderful plans getting ready, for this and other stuff. And suddenly the Union decided that they had an argument with the company and if I was to look back on that today and say, "How did that strike happen?" There was two people at fault: one from the company and one from the Union. And Lordy, whoever ... The head of the company at that time, and I'm trying to think. Was it Joe Camp? But both people should have been pulled out because it turned out to be a personal battle. The problem was we all suffered from it. So very suddenly, all of our plans were thrown out the window.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



Staff were asked to run the plant site. And, like I say, five months and 13 days. It started on May the 1st, May the 3rd, of 1986 and went on, like I say, for five months time. So George and I were assigned to work out the manpower deployment to run the plant on a four-shift, two-shift basis, going into a three-shift basis, eventually into a four-shift basis. But initially we ran two twelves, that day. And we had to get people who had essentially never turned a valve in 20 years. We had to teach young ladies how to check equipment and use a dipstick. Some of them didn't even use it in their own vehicle. And it was kind of tough. The only thing we had going for us . . . we were really mad at the Union for dropping it all and going out. And of course, later on we were mad at the company too for allowing this to happen. It shoulda never happened. It was a silly strike, like most strikes. But to cut a long story short, we got the people in place, we ran the plant the best we could, and we broke production records. How about that? Here was Staff [laughter], midnight shift but morale was very high. We stayed in camp. We didn't go home. If we did go home, it was probably to get a couple of cases of beer for camp, or something. But we stayed in camp for quite a period of time, ran it, got a high production. Management were amazed. We did our thing. I never drank so much coffee in my life.

But five months and 13 days, the Union come back. And when a Union comes back to a plant that's been out on strike, it's a very sensitive time. You've got to be careful there's no blame game. We had already cut open all the lockers and all that stuff, to get tools and all that stuff. Found some funny stuff there. But we had to get back and welcome them back. It was a very sensitive time, and one or two supervisors didn't follow the routine and we had to come down heavy on them, for not doing that. Because it's over with now, it's like a surrender. You know, you treat them right. Now they're back to operating the plant and you go back to your old job. So it was quite a lesson.

Since '86, there's never been a labour problem at the plant site. Never. Anything that needed to be solved has been solved well. But what the company did after that strike was change the whole labour codes, engage better communications, which after all it's all about communications. And it was all about personalities. And it should never have come down to one person to one, when so many people were affected. So we, the company, learned a lot from that. And the Union learned a lot as well, because a lot of people . . . Some people actually declared personal bankruptcy. They were in the middle of buying houses, and suddenly there's no job and it's five months? And the banks aren't going to wait for five months. So lessons were learned, put it that way. And like I say, labour peace has been in place now throughout.

AD: And then of course, there was the fire. So tell me about that.

BM: Thanksgiving Day of '87, I was sitting at home. It was the weekend. And my friend at the . . . I was on call for the company, but not that weekend. I took call duty every third weekend for



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



extraction. That was the other thing we did in training—always on call. We had the big satellite phones—no cell phones in those days. We had big satellite phones. Anyway, I got a call from my friend Dave Holmes from home, saying, “Hey, I hear there’s a fire in extraction.”

And I said, “Well, it must be plant four, because plant four uses naphtha.”

“No,” he says, “It’s plant three.”

I says, “I can hardly believe it.” That’s bitumen. Bitumen doesn’t burn.

“No,” he says, “One of the supervisors at the powerhouse, utilities plant, called and he says it’s definitely plant three.”

Oh, oh, oh. So David called me, and I said, “Well, I’d better phone the vice president.” So I phoned Arnie Godin.

“Arnie,” I said. “I’m sorry to have to tell you, but there’s a fire in extraction. I don’t have details but I think we’d better head up there.”

“Okay, get in there right away.” So I did. And I ended up being there for three days. Never got back home for three days. Anyway, we did find out that the fire had started in extraction. It had started outside the wall of the extraction plant and migrated up the wall that was soaked with some diesel from the conveyor belts; diesel used in the conveyor belts to help the bitumen or to stop the bitumen from sticking to the belt. Later on, they used an inert, vegetable-based product, but at that time it was diesel. To be honest, and George probably would have told you the same story, predictable. Predictable, and warned, and no action took place. People said, “It’s going to catch fire.”

“Well, it’s okay now. There’s not a fire now. Why worry?”

“Sorry, it did catch fire.”

So, it was a huge fire, and it burned I think, and Dave will confirm, from his chopper trips, about three days or maybe a bit more than that. Three days. Just a horrible, horrible situation.

AD: But there were no fatalities.

BM: No fatalities. Very minor injuries, that was all. The only thing that, of course, we had to be careful of . . . All the old electrical transformers were located—today we wouldn’t do that—through risk analysis. Bechtel located them above the control room. And they were filled, like some of the



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



pots like electrical. You see those pots, OCBs? Oil circuit breakers are filled with PCBs. Polychlorinated oil, which is used as a coolant for electrical transformers, but it's proven a cancer carcinogen. So they were leaking through the roof down into the control room. And that's where all my training records were, just right next door to that. All my filing cabinets were lined up. My movies, my records, databases, computers, everything was in that section. Out of bounds. The specialist came in and said, "Sorry, nobody in there. We're limiting it to four people with the moon suits." That was it. But all in all, it was a terrible thing.

We had the ... The original vice-president flew in from Philadelphia, and I met him at the door of the plant one day, and he said, "What have you guys done?"

And I said, "I suppose you can say, ya, 'We guys, we guys,'" except that we told the boss about this diesel and he never did anything about it. So in reality, like many fires, it was predictable. There was warnings.

AD: Did Suncor sue suppliers and so on?

BM: Ya, there was a question of the cabling, the insulation on the cabling. Because what had happened was part of the thing was the outside diesel. But had that been the only problem, it would have been back pretty quickly. But the fire spread into the roof section where it had electrical cables. And as it turned out the cabling insulation on the high-voltage cables, which if I were to recall, it would have been a 480 supply. So it came from ... 38 ... ya, it came from ... It would have been a 480 cable supply, and they had a very heavy rubberized compound, which unfortunately turned out to be flammable. And the fire spread like a welding torch, like a Christmas sparkler, all the way down this cabling. And it went on and on and on. And the only guy was up with his camera, and he had an infrared sensor checking for hot spots for days after that. But they did sue the company, and the assessor, whom I knew personally, Mr. Hudson, Mike Hudson, he come around, and he said, "Oh, we're going to court over the whole thing." Ya, hopefully from Bechtel Corporation. And they did. They settled, actually out of court, and got a whole pile of millions of dollars out of the whole thing. But it was ... I think it was something like a \$55 million fire in '87, 1987, which multiplied by four today, so substantial. Fortunately, nobody hurt, but we felt so helpless, because there's flame everywhere and I ended up and the vice-president came over and before I knew it the guy next to me on the hose was the vice-president. And he's in his suit with his coat and tie. And the fireman came over and said, "Get the hell away from there, Arnie. You know, he's got no protection on, and none of your fire protection suit.

So I said, "Let me do it." And the Syncrude firemen arrived. The plant had a very good sharing arrangement with Syncrude, and we had Syncrude people come over very quickly. Then we had a



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



bunch of people come over from Fort McMurray fire department come on the plant scene as well. But it still burned for over three days. It was scary; it really was scary.

AD: So what about the rebuild after?

BM: Rebuild was very interesting. We had very good people. Ernie Kalmatovitch, the gentleman who is quite ill right now, and I'm due to see him next weekend. Ernest was in charge of the project for the part of the rebuilding control rooms and all that stuff. So Ernest said, "Well, we didn't like that other digital control room. We're not going to go back to those people. So we're going to do it right this time."

I said, "Thanks Ernie." So I was on that team with a bunch of other people. We all had specific duties and assignments, because in a crisis you got to drop everything. You know, you don't do your normal job. It's survival. We had to get the plant back. The fire wasn't in the mine. It wasn't in the upgrader, but there's no bitumen going through. So we had to get going. And Ernest did an excellent job. He chaired that whole committee with a whole bunch of specialists. And I was in part of the ergonomics of the control room. And then we were sent out to Phoenix. We were sent out to Philadelphia. We ended up in Minneapolis, for Honeywell control room. And to help with the ergonomics of the Honeywell new control room. And I loved it. The Honeywell guys were great. This is Thanksgiving Day. So by December, we were getting ready to commission a new control room.

So a thing I'll never forget, the boss called me in and said, "Look, I want you to look after those Honeywell people. They're coming in from Australia. They're coming in to Fort McMurray. It's January the 3rd and it's 30 below. Will you look after them? Get them out to the hotels. Get them in there. Look after them. We know from Australia that it's not winter right now. It's Bermuda shirt time. You'd better probably get them a couple of parkas." So went downtown, got a couple of parkas, went out to the airport. Sure enough they arrive, come off the plane, shivering. So I simply cut the tags off the parka.

I said, "Put this one." [Laughter] and took them out to the hotel, and got them in there and looked after them. And then got them a rental car. They were both from the U.S., but they had both been working in Australia for a year on some project, water project. Anyway, they come in and they got used to the place after a while. The good food and the camaraderie. Then we found out that some of them were good at chess or good at darts, so we found the best chess people and the best darts people. That kept them happy and going. But they were there for three months. We commissioned a control room. We got into production, I think February of '88, and never went back from that. Honeywell team trained up the people. Everything worked out great. We never would have lost a





second on that. We just got the plant back and got it going, brought it back up again. But losses for that particular year of '87 were quite considerable. We did have the production right up to the Thanksgiving Day, but I never forget Thanksgiving Day '87, the big fire. It was the biggest one. We had other fires, but that was a really big one.

AD: So it was the strike and then that.

BM: '86 strike; '87 fire. Ya, challenges again.

AD: And did they consider shutting down?

BM: No, fortunately, the things that were happening was that the world oil price was starting to come up a little bit. They were starting to see ahead. Most of the production problems were being solved or were being capitalized that way, so that the solution was seen. I mean if you throw back to '60s and '70s, a lot of the problems? We didn't know how to fix them. But now we did. Then it was a question of simply adding money and getting on with it and expanding it. But as it turns out, most of the problems still went back to bucketwheel. Okay? Bucketwheels not only needed three people each to operate them, but it needed a host of people to run them and maintain them.

And on top of that, we had the conveyor belts that because of the fact that the bucketwheels and the system didn't allow for a lot of hard rocks. Now, I don't know if George made mention that mining has what's called grizzlies. These are big bars like your fingers, where a rock is discharged and the oil sands goes through. But in any cases the rocks were breaking everything up and the rocks were ending up—especially frozen rocks—were ending up in extraction. Today that is not a problem because we've got crushers in place. But like I say, you move slowly, one step at a time, and in those days we simply were still putting rocks into the plant or frozen oil sands in large rocks. Now, if you think of a glass and you put ice cubes in it and leave it for a second, what happens? The ice cubes melt together. And then you can't, you know, break them up, unless you break them. That's what happened in the feed bin in extraction. The frozen lumps would come in, hit the feed bin, and they wouldn't go out the bottom, so we'd feed them into the drums in extraction. They'd simply sit in the bin. Nothing you could do with these in a huge, big 5,000 tonne bin. They just sat there like big giant ice cubes. So that was a problem over many, many years, called bin hang-ups—nothing psychological about that [laughter]—bin hang-ups. So, like I say, one of the many, many problems that was solved, that we got through and worked our way through.

But the big problems always pointed back to the mine. We always felt that if the mine could put the feed through, extraction could process it. You know, we might have a few little glitches, but we could always process the feed and get the bitumen down to the upgrader. Then of course, residence time was low. We didn't have a bitumen tank, as a kind of surge capacity. In other words, what I



mean by that, if extraction went down then usually within 24 to 30 hours the upgrader had to cut back, because there was insufficient bitumen in the tanks. There's nothing to process. So eventually down the road in the '90s, they built a surge tank at extraction which is there today and still in use, in fact. But all these little challenges.

I should rewind a little bit here and go back to the shifts. One of the innovative things we did because of the fact that we were initially working eight-hour shifts from day one, well eight-hour shifts move you into a long month with minimal days off, because you're always at work for that eight-hour day. So the idea was that perhaps if we increase the work day to 12 hours, we'd get more days off and you could go out to Edmonton and all that good time. The other thing is there's less travel time to the plant site, less bus time. It all seemed okay. However, the Alberta government would not allow that. They said, "Nope, eight hours is it, and anything over eight hours is overtime." Okay? Actually, nine. The GSR say nine. Nine hours plus is overtime.

We said, "No, we want to go to a 12-hour shift." And the company saw a benefit as well. So we had both the Union and the company agree that 12 was beneficial, but not the government. So we had a number of meetings in Edmonton with the government. Then, who intervened but the Alberta Labour Association. The group intervened, Reg Baskin and the boys. My old friend Reg, and Neil Reimer and a few others on the local labour association said, "No," he said, "If you do that, it'll affect all the unions in the province. We're not about to do that, because after eight hours you guys are still saying, 'Straight time for 12?' 'Ya, because we're getting lots of days off.' 'No, no, anything over eight, nine hours has got to be overtime.'"

So it went on for about two or three months, and finally the government said, "Look, try a 10-hour day." So we tried a 10-hour day, which ended up being six 10s. For one particular unit, the plant seg, which turned out to be the mechanical shop, referred to as "the top shop." So that was tried for one whole year, and it worked out exceptionally well. Okay? And it was 10 straight hours, and all that, and they were really happy about it. They got their hours in, they had less travel time, and they get more days off to go out of town. We thought, great. Even the road out of town was being upgraded from what it was. Terrible road, before then. So finally, after a lot of negotiation, sit down, going back and forth, we ended up going to the 12-hour day. So we initiated at Suncor the 12-hour day, and I'm trying to pin down the exact year it was, and I think it was ... I'm not sure it was in '81 or '82, or thereabouts that we initiated that trial for the 12-hour day, which now all the companies have. It's now part of industry, is the 12-hour day. But it worked out well, and it gave people more time off and less travel time, exactly what you would project. So that was an innovation that we did and it went quite well.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



As well as we set the hourly rates for the time and that became the standard for the industry. So we did have a number of innovations from the 12-hour work day and the hourly rate for everybody. And over time, a double time came in. I think in '83, as well, and the other companies had to adopt that as well, to stay in business. Otherwise, you lose your people.

AD: Let's go back to the shift to truck and shovel. Do you have any observations on that?

BM: Well, the first thing I knew there was ... The executive vice-president at the time was rather predisposed to bucketwheels. I'd a pretty good relationship with him, so I'm not going to say anything negative about him. Mike Supple. Mike came from Shaheen Refinery. He was originally from England and very well educated. He spent a lot of years getting several degrees in mining and became mine manager for a while. But Mike was generally speaking a bucketwheel guy. He had been in mining operation with the wheels. And he knew that truck and shovel had been used in the mine, but he saw a lot of problems with the smaller trucks at that time, which was about 150-tonners.

Now, I'd like to clarify something on trucks. The truck sizes were not limited by the truck engines, because marine engines were big, generator engines, they were all big. They could build big frames. The only science missing at the time was large tires. So the truck limitations, as I was told by the people who work with LeTourneau—LeTourneau being the inventor of all heavy equipment—and LeTourneau factory people said, "The biggest limitation was tires." So that's what I learned. It wasn't frames or brakes or drive systems—and I still believe to today that that's what it was. But Mike had 150-tonne trucks and he had the bucketwheels and he had the conveyor belts, and to get away from that he found it a wee bit difficult. So Rick George, our recently-retired CEO of Suncor Energy, who can ... extremely successful as we now know, decided that from all the evidence he was given, from all the advise, that he had to get rid of the bucketwheels. He had to go a new mining operation, and he said, and this was kind of common knowledge, that change was about to happen. And the next thing we know is Mike was retiring.

In fact, I got a call that said, "Set up a retirement party for Mike," which I did. They give me a budget and I set it up for the Sawridge Hotel. We had a party for Mike. Anyway, then the word was that a new executive vice-president was coming to the plant site. We didn't have her name yet. But as it turned out she was Dee Parkinson. She had been from Ontario Hydro, and had worked there for a number of years. Made a lot of changes. And the other thing was it was very straight terms of reference. She was going to be there for five years—big contract, the dollars were big, bonuses on top—but in order to reduce the expense for the changeover there had to be a reduction in people. So that was Suncor's biggest single, what I would call beneficial, change that occurred. The first thing that Dee said, and she met everybody—she's only five foot, two and a half—and she started



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



doing that silly, “I’m only here making a short speech,” and she was driving everybody crazy with the same pun every day.

One of the EVPs came to see her and says, “Look,” called me in and says, “Look, Dave Ryan and you fix this podium so that ... Either fix this shorter, cut a foot off it [laughter] or do something. I don’t want to hear any more short jokes.” And he reported to her.

I said, “Geez, Dave, this is somebody else.” So, anyway, Dave called me in.

Dave was laughing, “What the hell do we do? She’s five foot, three. Do we stretch her out? Put her on a stretcher?” But as it turned out, we actually ended up getting a block for her to stand on, and then the carpenter shop cut six inches off the bottom of the podium so she could look over the top. This is one of the funny things that happened with Dee. But to get to the point. She was a very dynamic lady—right stuff. No nonsense. We knew very quickly that she wasn’t in there for the duration. She was in there to do a job. That became apparent after a while.

The first speech she said was, “I am here to listen. And I’m here to listen for six months. And I’m going to listen to everybody and anybody I meet.” And so she went around the plant site with her cover overalls on, her hardhat. Some people mistook her for a janitor at one time [laughter]. Here’s a lady with a hardhat on.

She went down to the upgrader, and somebody was at the permit desk, and she arrived at the permit desk: “What the hell do you want?”

“Well, I’m the new EVP.”

And the guy just about fainted [laughter]: “My job’s gone now.” And she laughed at that. But anyway, she did listen for the six months, and so right after the six months, things started to happen fairly quickly. She brought in a new organization, but she also announced there were going to be cutbacks. Now we didn’t know when, but within several weeks we knew the cutbacks went across the board: staff and union, right across the board. So it was all based on your retirement date, how close you were to it. Rudy Kruger, who was the vice president of human resources, and one of the real heavies on the plant site—strict and disciplined—and you’ve got to be careful when you talk to Rudy. But anyway, Rudy was put in charge of this operation.

The first thing he did was go in to the CRA, the tax people, and say, “What can I do to give an enhanced package for people?” That worked out fine. Then it was a question of selecting who goes and who stays. That became extremely difficult if you weren’t within the retirement group. The retirement group were quite happy.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



In fact, some people shook hands with Dee right then and said, "Thanks, you know it's a nice package. Great, out of here." They were retired fairly quickly.

In my case, I had a three-year window, almost a three-year window, so they said, "Ya." This was '91. On May the 1st of '94, that's your retirement." June 1st of '94, sorry, right after my birthday. "That's your retirement." I was treated very well. The only thing was our assignments were then switched around from reporting to my regular boss to Rudy and to Dee Parkinson. So I ended up doing some very regrettable assignments, which today I probably would have refused. And that is to tell people that their job is gone. And people have been there a long time. There is nothing in the world more, more terribly unnerving than telling a friend that you know and work with that their job is gone. And that there are certain conditions and you have to see HR benefits people and work out the package. And in two or three cases, we knew that people had just bought a home within the last 12 to 15 months at Fort McMurray prices. So they're walking away from it and still owing the bank. And that became extremely difficult and there were some incidences that occurred that I won't get into, but you know I felt ... You know, many of us felt good. We were treated well. The package, the date of leaving, the current assignments to do, but some of them I felt extremely bad for, okay? But in any event, overall, generally, with a few exceptions, it went fairly good. Some of them got their lawyers and all that stuff.

AD: How many people were let go?

BM: 400

AD: 400

BM: It was huge. It was approximately, I think it was roughly ... I think it was a little over 12 and a half, 13 percent of the plant site, which is quite high. And it was both union and that. And in the case of the union, the company made a commitment that either you could get this package and the recall list, be on the recall list with this package, or you could take a larger package and you're out of the company totally. So a number of people did take the recall. And as it turned out, six to nine months later, when the company expanded, they did bring those people back, and that worked out quite fine for them.

AD: And that worked out for them.

BM: Ya. For some of them. There was a number of options. So Rudy Kruger, and I was working for Rudy on assignment. And Rudy said, "Gee, you know, so far things are moving along well. Ya, we've got a couple of legal cases. But generally speaking the retiree section is going really well. And we've got a whole pile of people ..."





And Dee Parkinson knocked on the door and come in, and said, "What do you think about this. I think we'll have a retirement night for everybody, invite everybody, and we'll give them nice plaques and we'll throw on a big dinner," and all that stuff.

Rudy's eyes open, and he's, "Ya?"

And then the head of the mine come in, Cliff Britch come in. And I heard a conversation, "Party? Dee, you're putting on a party?" You know, this was the lady that cut back.

"No, no," she says, "We think that we'll just round it off. We don't want people looking to just walk out the door," type of thing. "Even with a cheque, we'd like them to have at least their wives and bring the men in," and all that sort of stuff. So to cut a long story short, they did.

So, once again, Rudy called me and said, "You've got \$25,000. There's a party. Here's a list of everybody. Here's a list of everybody. You're going to work with Della, the secretary, and we're going to get everybody's biographies, and we're going to thank everybody on the stage. Tell me what you need. Get it organized, book the hotel, do your thing, but your limit's \$25,000 for everything." But he said, "We'll pay for the plaques separate. Don't worry about that." Which he did. So had to arrange a party [laughter]. I've still got the brochure on that. It went very well. We got short biographies on everybody, where they came from, a few jokes. I actually went on the internet to dig out some jokes. Cleaned them up a wee bit. Did a little rehearsal. Got some opinions from people. And it went really well.

Two weeks later, Dee Parkinson called me in and said, "Boy, if I'm every going to leave the company and want a party, I'm going to call you up."

I says, "Ya, do that." She had a house at Canmore then, at that time. Now she's sold it, and she's in B.C. But anyways, we had it at the Sawridge, which is a great place anyways. But we did have everybody's biography. We had the clock, limiting ... you know, no more than two minutes per person. And we had God knows how many people we had to get through. But I also said, "If we're going to introduce the retiree, we're going to introduce his wife." And I remember the union president, who was retiring, and his wife didn't know too many people—she was a quite lady—but she was a nurse.

And I got her biography and I came out, and she, boy, she sent me a beautiful letter later: "It's the first time I've been introduced at a party. You know, I'm always in the background because my hubby is the union president." But that worked out very well, the changeover.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



But moving on to the actual truck and shovel changeover. Dee put together an excellent team. Doug Ayotte and Peter Biel in the electrical side. A bunch of contractors together. And the changeover was done in stages such that we could still operate part of the plant and go with it. The only single problem was the collapse of the wheel that occurred on that day. It was so traumatic, my temporary boss at the time was Mark Halama, and I came to work that day, and it happened as I recall it was the early morning. It happened when it collapsed. And oh man, he was trapped. He was trapped in the bucketwheel, and that was the most horrible, horrible situation. And I said, "No, I can't go out. I'm not going out there." A lot of people were trying to get outside and look, but they kept people back. And it was all covered. The RCMP were there, investigators. Occupational Health and Safety were flying in. And not only that, but we knew him and his Dad. You know, and his Dad worked there as well. And, this was just ... And you know, regrettably, like all accidents, preventable. Absolutely preventable. Certain things were not done. And when you don't do certain things, you pay the cost. And I don't want that on the record. Any fatality ... in fact, we've always said, "You can look at an accident, and look up to the preliminary things that lead up to the accident to find out it was preventable." My daughter's death was preventable, if you add up all the things that happened ahead of time. So that happened, and it was a very, very bad thing in the company. We were in the middle of a successful changeover and all the rest of it. But going to the truck and shovel, it went very well.

The other thing that I should mention that changed radically at Suncor, that is not talked about today, is that Suncor mining equipment always operated on the left-hand side of the road. Okay? Dave Ryan was one of the guys who really helped out on this as well, and my training crew. Suncor wanted to conform with Syncrude—and Albion was coming in ... Albion Sands—and move to the right-hand side of the road. Now, can you imagine a truck that weighs 80,000 kilos, suddenly now you're moving it from driving it on the left to driving it on the right. And you've got another one coming towards you. What's going to happen? Granted they're only at 30 clicks at speed, but that's 60. And suddenly, what would happen if one of them stayed on the left and the other guys on the right? So the manager of the mine, my friend Paul VanHorn—he's the wonderful, very capable guy; great guy—I loved working with him—he said, "Boy, we're going to do it on a weekend, we're going to do it when nobody else is around. The contractors are gone. And we're going to work out all the shifts end up coming in, even the guys on days off. We're going to try and work an overtime deal. But we're moving from left to right on the mine."

Well, again to cut a long story short. Over three and a half, four days, we did it. We did it without and incident. And today nobody thinks about it. It's all running on the right-hand side. But that was a major changeover that we had to do. That historically, it started on the left hand. And all the trucks we had at the mine at the time, coal trucks and everything, were left-handed, from the British





system. But we did that, and Paul ... I remember him coming into my office and said, I still remember him today. It was Sunday morning. No it was Monday morning at about 10 o'clock, and he'd been there all weekend. And he was just totally bedraggled, and I was the on all week and I was bedraggled, drinking coffee 24 hours a day. And he sat in the chair, and I think he fell off the chair, or something. But he said, "Boy, we did it." [Laughter]

AD: Now, was there anything else that you want to mention in terms of your work for the company. Because I also want to ask you about your work with the retirees and also then with the Oil Sands Interpretive Centre. Those are the last two.

BM: Sure, no problem. Just as a summary, I worked 28 years for Suncor. I was very fortunate to be assigned many different projects, not only on the plant site but outside the plant. I did in Sarnia, Puerto Rico; was down in Phoenix doing some stuff. And the company treated me absolutely well. The earlier years naturally were the most difficult years, because there was no template to follow. We couldn't copy off of anybody else. In 1972, Bechtel came to the plant and said, "We're going to build another plant. We think they're called Syncrude. We really need to find out the experience of the plant. We're negotiating with your company to get this experience. And we're going to pay for it."

"Oh, good. Make the cheque out for me." [Laughter] Anyway, to cut a long story short, Suncor agreed, made an agreement with Bechtel Corporation to sell them all the knowledge gained in the preliminary years at the plant site, literally saved Syncrude millions and millions and millions of dollars. Like don't build any sumps. Build slopes. Little things about handling oil sands that saved millions of dollars. Again, that was called the Oil Sands Technology Package. Ernest Kalmanovich was in charge of it. We all inputted to it. The people came to the control rooms. Any time I moved a knob in the control room, the guy behind me from Bechtel would say, "What are you doing?" He'd take a note and all that stuff. So the company worked out a combined package of finance, cash, plus a lease. And the lease happened to be Steepbank, the old Steepbank that was owned by Von Hammerstein from way, way back. Von Hammerstein; famous Von Hammerstein. So, Suncor gained that lease, through of course government approval and all that stuff. But so that was the change-up technology. So in terms of the company, June of 1994 that was it.

And then moving on then, my friend, I've talked with my friend Ken Smart who's also retired the same time as me. Ken's an electrical engineer. I said, "Ken, I do know that in Calgary there is a small retiree club called the Sunsetters." And I said, "We've got about 160 people at least in the region and in Alberta that we know of. I don't know where they're all going after retirement. Probably some are





headed for Calgary.” And they did. But I said, “We probably should look at our retiree club.” And Patty Lewis, public relations manager at that time at the plant site, and I knew Patty quite well—she’s very helpful, and I’d done projects with her in the community.

And Patty said, “Oh sure. I’ll get the company requirements, because we will help to finance retirees based on the membership in your club.” Great. So we got the bylaws from Toronto, and we got the bylaws from Calgary, and then we wrote our own out. Went to the company. They agreed to it.

And “Okay, now how much you going to finance this.” And that was for ‘95, it would have been for January of ‘95.

And the company said, “Ya, we pay out a cheque to retirees in January ‘95.” But at the time, we didn’t know it was modeled on Imperial Oil. We didn’t know that until much later. We met Imperial. So they give us so much per head of each member. And that included a wife. A wife became a member, so that’s two. Say it’s \$40 a head, that’s \$80 per couple per year. Which was nice. And then you could add to that and run with your tournaments and socials and all the rest of that stuff. So essentially our club started in the latter part of ‘94, early ‘95. We rented an office from the seniors downtown. The computer section gave us an old computer, and all of a sudden we were in business. And that started with about 160 people. Today, it’s closer to 600.

AD: Wow.

BM: So the club is going very strong. It started, like I said, in ‘94. It’s 2012, so that’s the age of the club, so we have a legitimate board of directors. My good friend George is now president. And a very good run organization—one of the best. It’s now a registered society as well. The company wanted that for legal purposes. So early this year, it’s now registered. So we communicate with the Toronto ones and the Calgary ones all the time. Jane Morris is membership secretary and does a wonderful job. In all of the world, she’s one of my favourite people. Without Jane, I’m telling you. She’s kind of the, not the godmother but maybe the grandmother, certainly, of the entire group, because she knows everybody. Because everybody in the plant site was processed through Jane for their retirement. Okay? Or when they leave for other reasons, Jane is the person. So that went really well. So then I out of Suncor. We had the retiree club.

And then the next was well ... One of my friends, he said, “Look, you’ve been in the training business. One of the things I’d like to do in Fort McMurray ... We don’t have a driver education group here in Fort McMurray.” I said, “Well, AMA does have one guy, part time.”

“Ya,” but he said, “Why don’t we open up a driving school?”



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



I said, "Well." I didn't really think I'd like sitting in a vehicle with somebody else. And then there's the financing, setting up a business, the whole bit. "Okay. Well, okay, let's explore it at least." If we don't like it, that's fine. So we did. We talked to AMA. We talked to another guy. It didn't work out.

We talked to AMA, and they said, "Oh ya, we need to expand. The people, the place is expanding. We're looking at more young kids. We need more training for younger kids." The high school at that time had eliminated automotive training that year. Before that, every time the kids got automotive training. Why they took it away, I don't know. So anyway I wrote a contract with AMA, and they provided us with two cars. And I did a little bit of training, kinda enjoyed it. Could have written a book about all the fun we had training people in vehicles. Some of them had little English. They had their husbands in the back seat giving directions and all that stuff. But anyway, did that for about, I think about a year and a half. And then we finally decided that the costs were too heavy. The cost of gas shot right up, so there was no money to be gained. We were working for ... you know, probably about \$8 or \$9 an hour. It's not worth it. And we're out on the road all the time, and the risks.

So we reluctantly said to AMA, "Thanks, but no thanks."

Now my former boss—one of the bosses I had—said, "Look, the lady from the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, Marsha Regensburg, and Bruce, Marsha and Bruce are retiring to Victoria." And we need somebody to look after the place.

I said, "I don't want a big commitment."

"Well, we need somebody to input the design, because there's some changes in the technology taking place. And why don't you meet with the guy." It happened to be in a few days. It happened to be Tom Thurston. Tom Thurston came up, and I sat down with him.

Tom said, "You taking the job?"

I said, "What job? I'm only helping you here from the knowledge of the plant." And SAGD was starting to come in as well at that time. Roger Butler's work.

And Tom said, "Oh no, Marsha's definitely gone. She's back from India." Marsha went to India for a year for some kid's thing she was on. Came back. Somebody wasn't happy with that. I think it was Fritz, Fritz Pannekoek wasn't happy with that. But he wasn't too happy with the Friends situation.

So I said, "I don't know what I'm getting into here, but I'll listen to anybody if you want to tell me." So as it turned out with them, they sent me a ticket to go to Edmonton and talk to Fritz and Terry Keyko.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



So I went down there, and they said, "Oh no, this is what it's all about." Totally different picture than I'd got already in Fort McMurray. "So, we need a position filled. It starts in six-weeks time." They already had my curriculum vitae and all that stuff. And Fritz said, "There's only one problem. "

I said, "Only one?"

He said, "You have to raise \$2 million dollars."

"Oh, is that all."

But he said, "You did raise money before?"

I said, "Ya, the United Way and Keyano College Foundation. Ya, I've raised a fair bit of money all over, but with a whole group of people. But you're talking ..."

"Oh no, you've got the Friends organization there."

"Oh, okay," Well, little did I know at the time that the Friends never raised a cent. Not a cent. Not a single cent that I could determine anyway. So to cut a long story short, I decided to take on the project, and I was less concerned with the money as with the actual job. And the staff that were there. Nancy Dodsworth was there, and I'd met Nancy before. Just a wonderful person to know.

And then he said, "Well, Nancy did apply for it, and she didn't get it."

So, oh boy. Why not? I was going to ask.

"Well, we're not going to mention that."

"Okay, I'll take on the challenge," which I did.

I started in November of '97. I think it was ... ya, '97 in there. And they started into the fundraising cycle, but Grant Tolley was there, and I sat down with him and I says, "Grant, I don't feel particularly comfortable. I know the companies. I know the people. I know how to get the money, but I'm not a friends' member. How do I keep within the legalities of this stuff?"

So we spent a lot of time, and in fact Grant said, "Well, come on down to Edmonton and we'll talk to Fritz as well, just to keep things in the clear."

And I said, "You know, Judy up there, running the Friends. They've got the registered society's number, but I'm not of them. I'm government. So if I start asking for money from government, what's the problems?" And of course, there would be problems, legal problems. So I was in kind of



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



a legal limbo. The Friends didn't know what to do with the fundraising, had no idea how to raise money, although there was a committee for Friends. From Syncrude and that ... well actually there was a committee, but they didn't know where to go. And I thought, well I know a lot of people who will open their chequebooks, starting with Finning. I knew the people at Finning. And it turned out we got 100,000 from Finning, and they were the very first donor. So to cut a long story short, then we went right into it. I was on a dotted line, if you like, on paper at least, to the friends. So if anybody was asked, from government, if it was asked, "Well, here it is." But it was a difficult relationship, because of the history of the place. And how the Friends were effectively not just simply running the gift shop or the front desk, but running the building.

And I said, "Well, sorry, if I'm there, I'm running the building." So it got to be a little bit of a problem there. There's all kinds of little things happened, and you know.

AD: So when did you leave?

BM: I left in January of 2006.

AD: So you ..

BM: I got to \$2.3 million. We cleaned out the old exhibit hall. I not only worked well with the group ... Michael Payne chaired. I got all the geology together. The chemistry folks, got at least two PhDs, got the paleontologist from Syncrude, to come over. Other people ... Derek Kershaw—I don't know if you remember Derek—Derek was on the advisory committee. A lot of contacts, in terms of artefacts. One guy, I think it was a geologist, gave us a rock collection, with a case, everything. Worked out really good. So the contacts all worked out fine. So I could call on people. The other thing ... Mike Ashar came to the plant site.

AD: No.

BM: But she was on the candidates list against Alison Redford in Calgary, for the Wild Rose, because there was nobody else in that particular riding down there. But anyway, Mike ... I knew Mike. I got to know Mike really well at plant site, and Mike said, he said, "Look, I'll help anyway I can."

So I talked to Derek, and Derek said, "Oh, I'm going to talk to Mike to see if he can help chair the finance committee, because Mike's got more contacts as well." So that was a major thing that happened. I had Guy Boutilier on my side, because I not only needed money from the industry but I needed money from the government.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.



So Guy said, “No problem.” Stan Woloshyn was head of Community Development, our department. So Stan did a very good job on seniors, and at that time, if you’ll recall, seniors was part of community development. So Guy said, “I’m going to give you a call. I’ve asked Stan to come up and meet with him. And I’ll take him to lunch to the Sawridge. Let’s beat up on Stan.”

I said, “Let’s beat up on Stan?” You know, 350-pound Stan. 150-pound Guy.

“No, no,no,” he said, let’s do it.

Anyway, we sat down to lunch with Stan. He committed \$400,000, but over two years. Hey, that’s good money in the bank. But once you’ve got that commitment from government, that’s fine. So excellent. Really, really good. Stan was great. Absolutely great.

AD: So you left the community with that legacy.

BM: Ya.

AD: I think that I’ve got everything that I need. And so we’re going to call it a wrap. And I would like to thank you for your assistance, not only for agreeing to be interviewed but also for identifying people within the Suncor retirees group to be interviewed. Thank you so much for all of your assistance.

BM: No problem. You’re certainly welcome. Whatever editing’s going to be done ...

AD: There’s no editing. I mean,...

BM: Oh, that’s going to be tough. [Laughter] People will be watching paint dry before they’ll ...

AD: Well, it’s going into the archives. It’s going into the Glenbow Archives.

BM: Thank you, Adriana.



Sponsors of The Oil Sands Oral History Project include the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Athabasca Oil Sands Corp., Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Canadian Oil Sands Limited, Connacher Oil and Gas Limited, Imperial Oil Limited, MEG Energy Corp., Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada.