

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Alex & Nancy Chaba

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr

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Side 1 only – 25:30

AK: I'm Aubrey Kerr and I'm in the home of Alex and Barbara, is it? Nancy. Alex and Nancy Chaba, and the address is 5224 – 47th Street on the northeast, almost the last house out on the edge here. Was this house one of the Imperial Oil houses?

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Well what I want to do Alex and I want to go back to your roots and I want to know what year you were born in and where and the names of your parent.

AC: I was born in September 17th, 1925 in the district called Eastgate, just Southwest of Redwater. My dad's name was Fred and my name, my mother's name was Johanna.

AK: And they had, and they had come over...

AC: Came in through Germany from Ukraine in 1910.

AK: And they homesteaded?

AC: They homesteaded, that's right.

AK: Was it on that parcel here...

AC: ??? of a mile apart. Yes.

AK: Farther south?

AC: No, straight west.

AK: Straight west. And Nancy, you were you were born where, in Redwater here?

NC: Yes, I was born...

AK: ??? relation to Anne Yachovic?? or is that not the same?

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Yeah, I see but it's the same spelling Y-A-C-H? Not exactly?

AC: Not exactly. It's spelled ???

AK: That's what, that's what happened, you know when the, when your forbears came to Canada the immigration officials couldn't understand what you were, they were saying and then they ??? anything down that suited, you know, is that a fair statement? (tape jumps) Named Boston, yeah, and their original name was something else.

AC: ???

AK: Oh, is that right? So you grew up on this farm of your dad's, Fred?

AC: That's right.

AK: And what school did you go to?

AC: I went to Eastgate School and then I went to Ufford School in Redwater...

AK: Back to Eastgate. What grade did you go to there?

AC: Grade one to nine.

AK: And then Ufford School. Now that was on the edge of the town of Redwater, wasn't it.

AC: But the time I went in, it was in the town of Redwater.

AK: Oh, that brick building.

AC: Yeah.

AK: Yeah, and it was it was used right up through the oil boom.

AC: That's right, yeah.

(tape jumps)

AC: I went to Victoria High School to complete grade 12.

AK: How did you manage that? Did you go in and board in Edmonton?

AC: That's right, yeah.

AK: Relatives?

AC: No, I stayed in the Alexander...

(tape jumps)

AK: ??? board? Far away from the school then, eh?

AC: 13 miles.

AK: Oh, that's a fair distance. What year was that that you went to high school?

AC '45, in Edmonton...

AK: U of A?

AC: That's right. '47. ??? in '48.

AK: Education degree?

AC: I was going to, yes.

AK: Then you went... (tape jumps) a letter of designation or? What did they call that? You didn't have to go to normal school, did you?

AC: It wasn't called normal school, it was...

AK: Oh, way out there, did you have any oil patch people in the school.

AC: It was just starting.

AK: Just starting. So you're mostly were... (tape jumps) A month!

AC: I mean a year, pardon me.

AK: Yeah, that's...

AC: And that was a \$200 subsidy because it was considered isolated.

AK: When did you and Nancy get married?

AC: '52.

AK: '52. By that time the oil boom, the drilling was over. When the ??? big moved out to the Cook property, there was nothing here.

AC: There was nothing.

AK: But the gas was burning out of...

AC: Yes.

AK: Is that right? And were they producing water? Some of them...

AC: Well, see what happened a lot of places were slewsy??? and when they drilled and the slews...

(tape jumps)

AK: Using a lot of dynamite?

AC: They did, yes.

AK: Well, some of them were from the States, weren't they?

AC: They were, yeah.

AK: Yeah. Did you run into any blacks that were working on...?

AC: I never saw a black fellow. ??? just to give you an example, it's ??? they were very good, outside of ???

AK: They did, in those days they did respect the teachers for what they were.

AC: I guess they did, yes.

AK: Well maybe they ??? (tape jumps) They came in as parents then, didn't they? Except the hobnailed boots?

AC: Yes. I didn't meet their... their marriage, I didn't know if they were married, but they were tough guys like, they could have done anything they want because ???

AK: (tape jumps) furtherance of their child's education, where they interested really or were they...

(tape cuts out)

AK: You might say vagabonds, moving on from one place to the next.

AC: I didn't have too much personal experience, but what I gathered...

AK: Yeah, you're quite right, Nancy, they were drifters and I think those are the ones that caused the most problem wouldn't you say?

AC: Oh, yeah.

AK: The drinking, the fighting.

AC: Oh yeah, it was nothing unusual to go in front of the hotel, and see them ??? square fight, and nobody did get...???

AK: Oh is that right? It was kind of a show then.

AC: He knocked him down and nobody picked him up. The other guy didn't ???

AK: Just define that a little more, what you mean by square fight.

AC: I don't know where the term square fight came in, but they said that what they call a square...

(tape jumps)

AK: Was that the end of the fight?

AC: That was the end, yeah. ???

AK: ??? the rigs? The competition?

AC: Yeah, or "I'm better than you are"...

AK: Oh, that sort of thing. That's interesting. (tape jumps) For who could drill the fastest hole? Did you ever hear about that?

AC: I didn't hear that part, but I know there was some kind of competition...

AK: An awful lot of competitions, see the holes were so shallow, it didn't take long to drill them.

AC: That could be part of it, yes.

AK: See there's only about 3,000 feet deep. There's another person that was pretty handy with his dukes and that was Burt McDonald. Do you have any stories about Burt?

(tape cuts out)

AK: Colorful. Is that right? Well, I was yeah, well he would, he would settle some of the fights that I was told that Vandergrift would start the fight and Burt would finish it. Well there was some instances where there was a tire iron or logging chains or what. Do you know what it was that?

AC: ???

AK: Well I heard the story about that, now the name was Krulak, something like that.

AC: K-R-U-H-L-A-K

AK: ... Comment, well I'd heard little different versions of that, but it was at the that the vendors and, "come on outside, and"... Well, yeah. Well Bert, I think Burt didn't back away from a fight.

AC: No.

AK: No. Well. Yeah. Well, this is sort of stories, you see that are wonderful for the book. You know, I'm not, so I... all right. Well we've had that so much. The other thing was the, when the old hotel burnt down. It burnt down very shortly after the discovery.

AC: That's right, yeah.

AK: Who owned that, do you remember who owned that?

AC: Well, Cherchyn owned it originally.

AK: Oh, Cherchyn, yeah. Okay, so, did you approach the Imperial Oil to take a job or did they come...

AC: I heard they were looking for employees. I went to ??? production? There was nothing available...

(tape jumps)

AK: Kind of starting salary did you have?

AC: I think it was 91 cents an hour.

AK: ??? the dollar. Did you get company benefits with that? Like hospitalization or pension or...

AC: ???

AK: Yeah. Oh, that's okay. We don't need to know that. But your job was, by that time they finished up on Kerensky. They weren't using Kerensky anymore for Redwater, and that was before Pasemko.

AC: That's right. I started on Pasemko...

AK: ... work here in Redwater, or was it you started at Pasemko's...

AC: I started at Pasemko's, yes...

AK: Separate companies.

AC: They were, yes.

AK: What did you think of that, about keeping those two things separate. Do you have any views...

AC: Personally, myself, it was in ???

(tape jumps)

AK: The financing of the big line was it... there were different participants.

AC: That's right, you're right.

AK: So your job was labour (tape jumps) picking rocks and putting that hose over and...

AC: That's right.

AK: Now was there any safety precautions about breathing that H2S?

AC: No, that's the way ???

AK: ... realize it was lethal?

AC: No, nobody said ??? fumes are so heavy ??? gas mask ???

AK: That's what I'm getting at. I mean the company provided...

AC: Oh, yeah they did, yeah.

AK: It was against the law to work up there without gas masks.

AC: [inaudible]

(tape jumps)

AK: ... ships of oil. Did you have to keep that in mind?

AC: [inaudible]

AK: How would you handle that?

AC: See, we have, okay, we have ??? which were affiliated or...

(tape jumps)

AK: You'd have to know whose well it was. Well, how would you handle... did you have tickets?

AC: Yes, we were ??? tickets on each one, yes.

AK: What about Amerada.

AC: Amerada, where the main shipment was there, yes.

AK: They had to use your line?

AC: They did, yes.

(tape jumps)

AK: They ever indicate they would have liked to have done ??? themselves.

AC: There were rumours at one time that they were attempting to do that, yes.

AK: Right? Yeah. I just wanted to get that clear because there's, you know to get this history of what went on in those days you see. So, how long did you stay with Imperial?

AC: I stayed...

(tape jumps)

AK: I-P-I-S-I and Mitsue is M-I-T-S-U-E, you have to spell these out because my secretary, you know, wouldn't be too clear. Isn't that right, Sophie? Okay by this time you got married and worked here.

AC: Yes.

AK: Still with Imperial.

AC: Imperial Pipelines, yes.

AK: Yeah. Well then how long did you work with Imperial then, all together?

AC: I worked from '49...

(tape jumps)

AK: ... time, hadn't all the oil started to go through the one, through the field gate?

AC: Yes.

AK: So why would you need to work for Petrofina?

AC: That was the... Petrofina was a separate...

(tape jumps)

AK: What did you do over at Petrofina?

AC: I was an operator, and I was also assistant foreman, and office worker.

(tape jumps)

AK:??? He was your boss. (tape jumps) Would there be some come out to visit? Like, did you ever see that Romanian, that Nitescu?

AC: No, no.

AK: Now that was before they got taken over by Petro Canada.

AC: That's right.

AK: So, what'd you do after 1980 (tape jumps) you mean like what you got around here now, pursued your own interests. Yeah. Well, that's interesting. You didn't go out and do any farming?

AC: No, no. ???

AK: ... is that I was out to interview the Courts. Now is that your titled land there? You own that land, eh? And you rent it out to them.

AC: Uh, no, ???

AK: ... don't have any ownership of the other parts of the Court...

AC: No they purchased that last year.

AK: Oh. You own it now.

AC: Now, yeah.

AK: That's quite a (tape jumps) Do you know them?

AC: Yeah.

AK: Yeah, they're quite a...

AC: Very nice people.

AK: Yeah Pearl, she's something else.

AC: Yeah ???

AK: Yeah. Well, that's, I'd say that would be pretty good. Well, what about your other interests, do you have other acreage around that you... (tape jumps) I have to go back, now this is when you were talking about Bannister...

AC: Majestic Pipeline.

AK: Oh, Majestic. Majestic Pipeline was a U.S. controlled company.

AC: That's right.

AK: And they were laying flow lines were they?

AC: Saltwater lines ???

AK: Oh, it was the saltwater. Did you get involved with the Redwater water disposal?

AC: No, I didn't, no.

AK: Now was this, this wasn't ordinary pipe. This was, didn't they use that transite, the asbestos?

AC: That's right.

AK: And these people come up, and were they pipeline people?

AC: Yes, experienced from the States.

AK: All right, tell us about what they did when you took them duck hunting.

AC: There's quite a story behind it. There was an American old father and son and both in very great shape...

(tape jumps)

AK: ... this duck hunting thing.

AC: See they said they had one advantage in their favor. They gained access from their people, their predecessors to them laying lines and ??? had access to all the farmers who they expected trouble from.

AK: Well, how did they, did they get permission from the farmers to enter the land and shoot ducks?

AC: Yes, we had range permission to go hunting ducks. Yes.

AK: All right, well tell me about some of the ones...

(tape jumps)

AC: ??? and all the way down to Simmons and they had a list of every farmer who to expect trouble from.

AK: And were you the proper.

AC: Oh, no, they wouldn't... they'd respect that, yes. But I knew all the areas we could go hunting in, so we had no trouble there, no.

AK: You knew the good spots did you?

AC: That's right.

AK: Did you have anything to do with that Skunk Hollow? Just outside, just on the edge of Redwater.
(tape jumps) Okay. Let's see, what else, let's get those stories about the pipeline. Some of them, the pipelines in the first instance weren't wrapped, you said, or coated or...

AC: They weren't... ???

AK: But they weren't...

AC: They could not stand okay, the salt ???

AK: Then there was no cathodic protection.

AC: None whatsoever. And the other thing was ???

AK: Sorry. So I'll just say there was leaks, they'd put clamps on.

AC: Originally.

AK: Yeah, and...

AC: See, originally some of the pipelines ???

AK: Well now what did you Amerada did?

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Well, what did they do that was different.

AC: They had a different set up entirely, they didn't believe in burying their pipelines.

AK: They just laid them on the surface.

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Oh, yeah. Well, of course, if you know...

AC: ??? the seepage, and the other thing what they do, in the summertime when the sun got hot, they'd ???

AK: So they'd get the wax out. I see. So, but Amerada were kind of a separate independent bunch, weren't they?

AC: That is right. See, the people that worked for Beretta, were working under an American firm, where we had to take Christmas holidays, different holidays, Canadian holidays, Americans didn't recognize them so they worked them with state pay, so they got beat both ways. They didn't get Canadian pay and they didn't get American holiday pay.

AK: You mean they didn't get U.S. money?

AC: No.

AK: They got Canadian.

AC: They're not American citizens.

AK: Yeah, but there was some of them on the U.S. payroll in Calgary.

AC: Yeah, they were listed as an American company.

AK: ... allowed to have their Canadian holiday?

AC: Well they never got paid for a Canadian holiday ???

AK: Oh, they had to work. And there was shift work... All right, so they yeah, I mean those are standard but the Canadian holidays didn't get paid for at Amerada.

AC: They got paid state time.

AK: State time. Yeah, is that what they called it. Well, then what about some of the others like Schermerhorn and Bishop and Ohio, some of those other U.S. outfits.

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Amerada was the only one that kind of stuck, it was right in the center there, Section 16. Yeah, very good part of the field. Well, that's interesting, you see that's the part that I'm most interested in is getting that the differences that were going on.

Okay, we're going to talk now about the Egremont thing and unlike what the son, Bernie, Bernie Persky told me that it was the difference in in the shipping class between Northern Alberta and CN, he doesn't have that right.

AC: I don't think ???

AK: No. Anyways, it turned out that that Persky's asking price was too much so that when they came to Redwater they went to, about, where the Redrest Motel is?

AC: Yeah, it was Charlie Onyschuk's place.

AK: How do you spell that? O-N-Y-S-C-H-U-K. And he had a, how large a parcel did he have there?

AC: Okay, he had a quarter of land just...

(tape jumps)

AK: That must be part of that where the Gulf Wells were.

AC: That's right, yeah. ???

AK: Yeah, but he wanted even more than Persky... so then, how did they find out about Pasemko I wonder.

AC: Must have been shopping around...

AK: It was right on the rail there.

AC: And don't forget, Aubrey, ???

AK: They could have built it right here by the elevators. Now, I was told that they didn't want to because it was too close to the elevators is there...

AC: Could be, I don't know that.

AK: No. So that's how it turned out to be Pasemko then. Right. Now, you're going to tell me the story about your wedding in 1952 and all the hand showed up? '53?

AC: [inaudible]

AK: Your dad, your dad had what he has some wells?

NC: Yes, he had ???

AK: Five quarters? Right and so they, did the hands from the oil company come to your wedding?

NC: Yes, ??? all of Redwater was there.

AK: All of Redwater.

NC: Yes, our wedding was in the ???

AK: Oh, outside, eh? It was nice warm weather? Oh, that's good. Interesting, that big turnout. Well, you must have been doing something right?

NC: Well my dad, he got along very good with ...

AK: Oh, it's not going on there. I'm sorry. Just say that again.

NC: Well, my dad had (tape jumps) the oil field man, and the agents (tape jumps)

AK: That is going, there.

NC: Anyone he met down the street or anyone that dropped to visit him, he invited them, so that was a successful wedding.

AK: Oh, and did it last the usual three days?

NC: Two days.

AK: Two days. I thought they usually lasted three days, the Ukrainian weddings. Well, maybe I guess we've just about got all the stories, have we Alex? You got any more? I don't know why it is, my voice I guess is raspier. But I'll say, gee, it's ten to six already and I think we will sign off, there maybe something else come up, but we'll sign off and I want to thank you very much for being interviewed and giving me some of the dope on the old days.