

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Jim and Chizuko Kimura

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr

DATE: September 27th, 1992

Side 1 - 45:00

[00:00:02] AK: Today is Sunday, September the 27th, 1992. I'm Aubrey Kerr and I'm in the home of Jim and Chizuko. That's C-H-I-S-K-O.

JK: Z-U-K-O.

AK: Oh, Z-U-K-O. Right. On the road, it's Road Number 22-5, just north of Highway Number 28. And I'm very pleased for being invited into your home and there's a lot of history that we've already looked at. But first of all, Jim, the house that we're in right here, the kitchen that we're in, was built in 1930 by your father. Is that right?

JK: Yes.

AK: Tell us a little bit about the house that he built across the highway.

JK: There was no house across the highway. He bought that farm while he was barbering, in the early... in the late 1900's, around 1918-1919, somewhere in that area. The farm, after coming to it, wasn't very productive so he purchased two more. another half section kitty-corner to that farm, where he farmed to the present day.

AK: Now, this house here was constructed by him using an English finishing carpenter. Is that right?

JK: That's right.

AK: And the house shows the style of lintels over the doorway, which is very interesting. And it looks like it's pretty solidly built, that it's going to be here for a while, would you say?

JK: Oh yes. It's been here for over 60 years. Would have been built in 19... finished in 1930, the construction. The first house was built in 1928 and after purchasing the land, the school section, what you call a school section, in 1927 they brought the first half of the house over, and then put an addition to it. And finished the house more or less in 1930 or '31. And when the Depression hit, the house was never completed and... because of the Depression. However, it's livable and we enjoy it very much.

AK: Right. And you've lived, you and Chizuko have lived here for how many years?

JK: Other than the oilfields, we lived continuously here. We were in the oil field for five years, then came back and lived here, before...

[tape jumps]

[00:03:54] JK: The part I don't... I don't know how it was advertised in Japan, to have them come, but all the... my dad came because he was a young man with adventurous... what you call it?

CK: Ideas?

JK: Adventurous idea. He was 19 years old at the time.

AK: And what year was that, that he came to Canada?

JK: He left Japan in the year, in 1903. First, he went to Hawaii, and he found work there hard and hot. The weather, it was extra hot weather, and work was very hard. He said there was no better place to live, if you have money. And just live with the climate otherwise. And then, to work to make a living, he felt it was too hot, so he ventured to the States. And then, when he went to the States there wasn't very much work there, and he heard about the opening of the... there had been a lot of work in Canada, so he came into Canada in the year 1905. And first he worked as a houseboy to learn English, but it wasn't his type of work. So, he soon left it and went fisherman, he worked on the railroad and sawmill. And that happened for about... in 1912, he came to Edmonton, where he started barbering and had a rooming house. And during the War, it was during the War years, so 1914 to '18 where he made abundant of money, but the people made fun of the Japanese people because of their statues or whatever you want to call it. But anyways, made fun of them and they didn't like this. So... and at the same time, the Japanese people became very successful and other people became jealous of them.

AK: Yeah, well that's typical.

JK: It made it very hard for them to live in Edmonton. At the same time though, the Canadian law prevented the Oriental people from expanding their business, like hotels and so forth. They couldn't get a license for various businesses.

AK: I see. So, they were restricted to the kind of business that they were going to get into?

JK: That's right.

AK: Yeah. Well, now was there any restriction, when they were thinking of coming out here, was there any restriction as to Japanese...?

JK: Well, this was a form of discrimination, so they thought that there was no future to expand a business or to become more successful, so they ventured to the farm. So, this happened in the early 1920's, or most of them bought land around 19... Right after the War. And then they came to... But anyways, among these four Japanese families, these very successful businessmen, they left their business and ventured to the farm. My dad was the first to buy his farm.

AK: Now he bought it, he didn't homestead on it.

JK: No, he bought the land.

AK: Yeah. It had already been owned. Had some of it been broken?

JK: No, very little. Just about the size of a garden patch or where he... It was all mostly bush. But anyways, with all the money that they had, they ventured out to the farm because of discrimination. And then they went farming and it was...they put... But by going to the farm, they were able to...
[Japanese]

CK: To sponsor.

JK: They were able to sponsor the relatives that wanted to come to Canada. My dad sponsored three nephews.

AK: Well, now, by the time...

JK: I mean two nephews and one member of his dad's...

AK: All right. But by the time your dad had decided with his friends to come out here and go farming, had he obtained his Canadian citizenship?

JK: Yes, they... During the, I don't know what election time, but some of the people went around and said, you better take your citizenship out to vote for a certain party. So that's how they got their citizenships.

AK: Right. So he was... he came out here as a bonafide Canadian citizen then?

JK: Oh yes. He had his Canadian citizenship.

[00:09:39] AK: Yeah, right. Okay. So, when this was underway, what year were you born?

JK: I was born in 1916.

AK: And you were born in Edmonton?

JK: I was born in Edmonton, yes. And in those early days, I remember the sidewalk on 103rd Avenue was lumber...

AK: Boards.

JK: Board sidewalks. And 101st Street between the subway and Jasper was cobbles with wooden, with tar over it.

AK: Right. And by that time, yes, by that time the railway had come in through the town then.

JK: I suppose so.

AK: Yeah, CN. You mentioned the subway. Yeah, railways...

JK: Well, this is from the subway to the... the subway was built afterwards. The subway was built in 1925, I believe.

AK: Now, when you had reached the age of schooling, had you taken any schooling in Edmonton?

JK: Yes. I took four years of schooling in Edmonton. And one of the other interesting times was around 1922 or so. The Indians, people from the Reserves used to come to the back alleys and pick up food from the garbage bins. I remember that, and I think it was soon after that the law must have prohibited them from doing that.

AK: Now at this time when you were going to school, were you sufficiently old to recognize discrimination then? Was there discrimination?

JK: At my young age, I didn't feel any discrimination, no. But the people in business, I guess especially during the War, I guess they, you know, they made fun of the Japanese people and the Chinese people and so forth, because probably of their size and colour of their skin and looked different I suppose. And the white men looked... like my mother was, when she first came, one of the things that frightened her was the size of the people, that she thought they were giants.

AK: Right. And then when you moved out here, did you continue your schooling?

JK: Yes, I went another four years 'till I finished my grade 8. In Maybridge.

AK: Maybridge? M-A-Y-B-R-I-D-G-E? Okay. And at that point then, did you feel, or did your parents feel you'd had enough schooling, or did you...?

JK: Oh, no. My dad always believed, my mother especially believed that I should have probably a university education and so forth. They were very enthusiastic about... most Japanese people, that was on their mind was to get a good education.

AK: So, what happened then? Did you pursue your more advanced education?

JK: No, I didn't. Although in later years, I went to Olds.

AK: Oh, Olds College. That's O-L-D-S.

JK: In later years though. That was quite a few years afterwards.

AK: Yeah, well you were a mature person then. What was that, a farming course? An agricultural course?

JK: That's right.

AK: Right. And when you got your grade eight, then your activities were a hundred percent farming?

JK: Most of the young people at that age quit farming as soon as they hit 15 years old. I guess the law was that they had to go to school until at least 14. So, most of them went to 14 and I ???

AK: That would be in the early '30's then?

JK: I guess it would be...16 and 14. Yeah, it'd be early '30's that's right. It would be '31 I think. The reason I quit farming, the reason I quit school was that it was the Depression years and dad had needed help to keep the farm going, so I quit school and went directly into farming. During those times, the 1930's, Dad got into some bad trouble with horses. Six of his working horses died.

AK: Yeah. I noticed that. Sleeping sickness.

JK: Sleeping sickness, that's right.

AK: Well, that would be a real blow.

JK: Oh, yeah. Another year or two after that, he lost all his machineries.

AK: Oh. So, he didn't escape the Depression then?

JK: And I saw how the implement companies had no mercy on the farmers at all. Dad went in to have them postpone the takeover of equipment...

AK: The seizure.

JK: One month, and they wouldn't give it to him. Dad doesn't read English. So, they made him sign something that they were able to come and possess all the machineries. By the time Dad came back on the bus, they had all the machines hauled out already. They came... that's how quick. They brought a Sheriff in and I was at home and my mother was at home and couple of hired men were at home. When Dad came home on the bus at 6 o'clock, the machinery were all gone. From noon, as soon as dad got into town, and they made him sign a release I suppose.

AK: Well, there was some terrible harsh times then. Well, you still had enough though to put food on the table?

JK: Oh...

AK: You grew enough, I mean you...

JK: I had enough. My family had enough food. But all of them probably didn't.

AK: No, that's right.

JK: The four Japanese... I guess we're getting ahead of our times, aren't we? The reason, that was the reason why all the Japanese, more or less, came to the farm. And there was the fourth family. I only know the four families that came. Three of the families came to Opal, and the fourth one went to Riley. He bought land at Riley and went farming there.

AK: Well, the records... just to get this a little sorted out more. The records show that there were some Japanese had filed on land here as early as 1912. That's two years before the beginning of World War One.

JK: My dad was the first farmer that I know of that... Did you look that up in the...?

AK: Well, that was in a record. I don't have it with me. A lot of stuff I leave behind. But it showed that some of the homesteading, now this is homesteading, not purchasing.

JK: You're not talking about Japanese.

AK: Well I am. I must get that...

JK: I don't know of any Japanese people who stands out.

AK: Well I'll, when I get back, I'll send you a copy of the...

JK: Yeah, please do.

AK: Yeah, I'll do that.

JK: Because if it is, it's not in my knowledge. I had always had the impression my dad was the first Japanese to come farming.

AK: Right, right.

[00:18:34] Okay, so maybe just for the moment we can switch to you, Chizuko. Let me get that name spelled right, will you?

CK: It's spelled C-H-I-Z-U-K-O.

AK: And your parents came out about the same time?

CK: Yes, as most other immigrants at that time.

AK: Back before World War One.

CK: Around 1909.

AK: And did they settle in Vancouver or Victoria?

CK: No, my dad came as, he came with a family of Japanese Consulate with an object of learning to speak English and getting himself a job in Canada. But after working as a houseboy for a few years, he went out into Vancouver and got himself a job. And in those days, it was customary for men to have their wives get married by picture. Picture marriage. So, that's how my dad and mother got married.

AK: Is that right? How did he get this picture? Did somebody send it to him?

CK: Well, it's through relations.

AK: Yeah, through relations.

CK: So, my dad met his wife in Victoria, and they...

AK: She got off the boat there.

CK: Yes. So, I guess they had a method of recognizing each other with a flower in the lapel or something. And eventually they came to Alberta and my dad, along with several other Japanese people worked in the potato fields, sugar beet fields for a while.

AK: And that's down in Raymond.

CK: That's Raymond, yes. And eventually they got, my dad got enough money to buy a bit of land, up on the ridge part of Alberta or Raymond.

AK: Around Lethbridge?

CK: No. It's south of Raymond, it's on the Milk River Ridge.

AK: Oh, yeah. the Milk River. You're getting close to the U.S. boundary.

CK: And in the meantime, he used to cook for the McIntyre Ranch as well. And as time went on, eight of us grew up and eventually my two younger brothers took over the farm. All together they had... how many quarters would they have had?

JK: Well, they became very successful farmers. One of the biggest Japanese farmers in the area.

AK: What was their family name?

JK: Matsuno. M-A-T-S-U-N-O

AK: M-A-T-S-U-N-O.

JK: That's right.

AK: And you pronounce it Matt-sin-oh?

CK: Yes, Matt-sin-oh.

AK: Right. All this expansion and success took place before World War Two?

CK: Yes, around then.

AK: Because that's the kind of a very important historical point. And did you, when were you born?

CK: I was born in 1924.

AK: In?

CK: In Raymond. And after finishing high school, I attended the Calgary Normal. The three months, that was the War Time teacher training program that the Board of Education had. And I didn't feel any discrimination then. I was able to find room and lodging in Calgary with some nice people. And after finishing the three months, I took up practice teaching. And then a couple of years after that I got married and came up here.

AK: Right. Well, let's go back to your education. You took your grade school and high school right in Raymond, is that right?

CK: I attended grade school in Mammoth Elementary... sorry, not Mammoth, grade school, up to grade 9. And I had to do housework in Raymond, with some family there, in order to go to high school. Because my family still lived on the farm.

AK: So, you, this was kind of a barter thing, eh? You provided domestic help for board and room.

CK: Board and room, yes. The names of the people I stayed with are Oren Snow, who was the Secretary Treasurer of Raymond at the time.

AK: Municipal District, eh? Yeah, right. S-N-O-W.

CK: Very nice man.

AK: Now he'd be, they would be of the Mormon persuasion?

CK: Yes.

AK: Yeah, most of the people in Raymond were Mormons. So, you had decided in your mind that you would like to be a teacher. Is that right? Is that your...?

CK: Well, in those days our world, or at least mine was, rather small and you only thought of being a teacher, nurse, or

AK: Yeah, there was about two or three professions.

CK: Those were the choices, yeah.

AK: Then did you have to pass any special exams to be admitted to normal school?

CK: No. I can't remember off hand, but it was under the same program as so many of my age group attended.

AK: And there was this shortage of teachers at that time. Well, that must have been... you see, that would be, that would have to be after World War Two started. Because, you see, you would only be...

see, World War Two started in 1939. So, you would be only 15. And of course, the difficulties that arose after Pearl Harbor, of course, that was, you might say a second phase of the War. So, by that time you were taking this normal school course in Calgary. Did you board in Calgary?

CK: Yes, with a nice couple there.

AK: Right. Where was the normal school at that time? Do you remember?

CK: Oh, no. I don't know exactly where the Calgary normal school... whether it still stands.

AK: Yeah, right. Well, it may have disappeared. Well, then during this time, after you got your normal school, were you given a school assignment?

CK: No. Could you get that [unintelligible] newspaper that you brought upstairs.

[tape cuts]

[00:26:36] AK: Well, then after you completed your... I'm on the tape now. After you'd completed your normal school, then did you go back to your parent's residence?

CK: Yes, in fact since my parents were up at the farm quite a few miles away from the public school, the grade school, the Mammoth School, I looked after my younger children while I went to this Wolf Creek Colony School for practice teaching.

AK: Oh, that would be a Hutterite, would it?

CK: A Hutterite colony, yes. Well, I cooked and took care of the younger brothers and sisters while they went to grade school. But coming back to the Hutterites, I had a nice opportunity to visit this Wolf Creek Colony this summer, after 40 some-odd years. It must be about 47 years to be exact. The wife of the boss of the colony happened to be a girl who I taught in grade 8. And she wanted to meet me, so my brother took us all, a group of us to visit the colony. And I was absolutely amazed at the fantastic improvement in their living conditions, as compared to that many years ago.

AK: Well, they went through a lot of struggles. They were hard-working people, very hard-working people. So, that was one of the assignments you did have as a result of your teaching training. And these other children you mentioned, they were your brothers and sisters?

CK: Mm-hmm.

AK: Right. So, you had a large family then?

CK: Yes, there were eight of us.

AK: Right. And they were all out on the ranch? I guess you could call it a ranch?

CK: Well, no, actually my parents had a farm. Which was located 15 miles away from...

JK: 15 miles up in the ridge country.

AK: Yeah, right.

CK: So, there was no school around. So, we went to ???

AK: You mentioned the word Mammoth. Is that the name of the...?

CK: The school. The Mammoth School.

AK: M-A-M-M-O-T-H. Is that right? Gosh, I didn't realize there was a place called that, but there are a lot of odd names, aren't there?

CK: Yes.

AK: Well then, during all this time you... Maybe it was because you were in Raymond area that you didn't get the impact that a lot of your people had when they were thrown...

JK: [unintelligible]

AK: Yeah, they were dispossessed.

JK: Yeah, we were treated a lot different than the people at the coast.

AK: Yeah. But then you had a, I suppose you had to welcome some of the people that came. Did they come from the coast to work in the beet fields?

CK: Mm-hmm. But we didn't have a beet field. We weren't in a beet field ...

AK: No, you were up in dry land.

CK: Dry land, yeah. Farming.

AK: No, but there were a lot of people that seemed to work...

CK: Yes.

AK: In Lethbridge.

CK: And even Raymond.

AK: Yeah.

JK: And some [inaudible]

AK: Right. So, this sort of thing that... you see, George Kiyooka tells one story about being fired from a job at Evan. And I don't know whether you'd...

CK: [inaudible]

JK: Fired from a job in Calgary. They were Calgarians.

AK: No, no. He worked at Namao Airport during the War.

JK: We didn't know.

AK: Well, anyways, he was on this job as a welder's helper. And I think it was a U.S. operated thing, you know, the U.S. had their nose into everything. And this fellow was watching, and he looked, and he saw George and the next thing George knew, he was fired for being a Japanese. And the Unemployment Bureau was very upset about him having been fired, but they couldn't do a thing about it. So, you know that's just an instance, you know. So, then, we're getting close to '46. Now how did you and Jim meet each other, if I may ask?

CK: Our Minister introduced us. We're of Buddhist, Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism. And our Minister introduced us. So, in July of '46 we got married and came up here and been here ever since.

AK: Well, you must have traveled down to Raymond, did you?

JK: Well, my mother used to correspond with the Raymond Church because that's where the only Buddhist church was at the time.

AK: Oh, I see. Right. So, did you make a trip down to meet Chizuko?

JK: That's right. We were introduced by the Minister.

AK: Right. Well, isn't that great. It's lasted all these 46 years, eh? So that was pretty good glue there that he stuck on you.

JK: Yeah, he stuck us together.

AK: Yeah, isn't that great. So, then when you had got married then, did you move up here to Opal?

CK: Mm-hmm.

JK: To this house.

AK: Come in and started a new life. As a wife on a farm here.

CK: Then I went back teaching in Redwater for five years. And then after that, I worked in the school library for another five years. So, after the family grew up.

AK: So, that was later on. That would be in the '70's?

CK: '67, I think?

AK: Yeah, right. After you'd raised your family. So, how many children do you and Jim have?

CK: We have three. Ken is the oldest. Pat, Patricia and Joy. They're all married and living in Edmonton. We have three grandchildren. The youngest of whom started grade one this year, the two young boys.

AK: Oh, boy. Isn't that wonderful.

[tape cuts]

[00:33:30] AK: So, I just wanted to get this on the tape, Jim, about your career. Up until 1946, you'd continued to help your father.

JK: That's right.

AK: Was he pretty active through those years?

JK: Oh, yes. Very. You mean farming?

AK: Yes.

JK: Yes.

AK: And he...

JK: He owned nine quarters at the time.

AK: Oh, he... and he kept adding to his land.

JK: Well, his peak of the amount of land that he had was nine quarters. But then he slowly, due to the Depressions and old age and whatnot, they started to go down. Sell pieces of it off.

AK: Yeah. but this peak of nine quarters. That was after, that was in the '40's, wasn't it? Or was that way back in the '20's?

JK: '30's.

AK: Oh, so he lost a lot of his land as a result of this, foreclosures?

JK: That's right. Depression.

AK: Depression. Oh, I see. So, when you were helping him, how many quarters had he been able to hang on to?

JK: I have that all written down but...

AK: Well, just roughly.

JK: Just roughly?

AK: Yeah. Two or three, or...?

JK: Let's see. At the peak of his ownership of land, he had nine quarters. One he gave to my, not gave but because he worked for my dad, one of the nephews that came as a sponsor, he took over one quarter. And then when we got married, Dad gave us this half section here. And then when he went back farming on his own, after we got married, we farmed in partnership, but then the land wasn't able to support the two families, so I went out to work. And he took over farming himself. And in the meantime, he sold one quarter, quarter and a half, I guess.

AK: So, you were down to a smaller amount of land then?

JK: Dad was, yes.

AK: Yeah. What are your holdings now, today? What do you have today, how much?

JK: Me?

AK: Yeah.

JK: I have a quarter. Quarter and a half plus 40 acres.

AK: And you're farming it still?

JK: No, I'm renting it.

AK: You're renting it out, right. Okay, let's go back to the both...

JK: I think we're jumping back and forth, back and forth.

AK: Well, I know we are. I know we are. It's not to worry about it.

JK: You're going to get it all mixed up I think, if you keep...

AK: No, I don't get it mixed up. Sophie's typing this up, maybe. She'll get it straightened out. I have a secretary and...

JK: Well, I guess you'd be more interested in why all the Japanese came to Opal, I'd imagine. Wouldn't you?

AK: Well that's... I'd like to hear more about that. But you'd already told me that they were persecuted in Edmonton.

JK: That's right. Discriminated.

AK: Discriminated and they come up...

JK: So, there was no more room for expansion.

AK: Yeah. Well, we've got that I think pretty well settled.

JK: So, they came to the farm in a very bad era. Because they brought all their money out. Like my dad for instance, he bought that half section there, and he bought this half section here, and then he opened up over 700 acres by axe and ??? as we call it. He opened up over 700 acres.

AK: With these fellows as labourers?

JK: And they were, and that was the group of labourers that he employed opening up one quarter section in one summer. And with all the labour and help, he opened up a quarter section. And all this money, and then he bought a full set of machinery, power machinery. And then that used up all the money that they brought from the city. And then when the Depression hit, it just wiped them all out.

AK: Yeah, right.

CK: What about the crop ???

JK: And in 1929 the crop froze, and 1930 was the downfall of the...

AK: Yeah, the price went all, right down...

JK: Right down from 1929 to '30. It was a dollar, a little over a dollar to start off, wound up about 60 cents, and then the price it came down to 18 cents in the middle of the '30's, or somewhere along there.

AK: Yeah. I remember that. I don't remember, but I remember hearing about it.

JK: How old are you?

AK: I'll be 77 in November.

JK: Well, you're my age, you should remember all those...

CK: He wasn't born...

AK: I wasn't born...

[tape cuts]

[00:38:58] AK: I just put this on tape now. I'd like to get from both of you your first ideas that there might be something going to happen out at Hilton Cook's farm. And all this seismic shooting that was around. Do you have any recollections of those things?

CK: It was quite an exciting time when we first heard about the discovery well. And when the seismic crew came around testing different areas, we were hoping that perhaps they would find a well on our farm, but it hasn't come to pass yet.

AK: A little too far west.

CK: Yes.

AK: Well now did they, do you remember what year it was that they were shooting in here? Was it '47 that they were shooting? Or '46?

CK: Or '48?

AK: Before the well hit, they were shooting.

CK: Well, I just can't remember, you know, would it be before the well? I suppose so.

AK: Well, they did a lot of exploration before they...

CK: I suppose so.

AK: Yeah. And they were shooting all across here. I just wondered, you know, whether when they come in here and shot, whether they ruined your water well there?

CK: No, nothing like that.

AK: See, a lot of them shot such great big charges of dynamite that it would ruin the farmers' water wells.

CK: Yes, we've heard of instances. But no, it didn't affect our well.

AK: No, right. So, the excitement and the interest must have been very high in Redwater.

CK: Yes. Redwater became a boom town. As you well know, it grew up from a few houses to enough homes to accommodate 3,000 people and almost overnight.

AK: And the good things and the bad things.

CK: Yes. Of course, we were far enough away from the town that things didn't affect us that much.

AK: No. Well, now this, there was no highway out here at all, was there?

CK: No, I was coming to that. Before Redwater oil boom started, the Highway 28 did not go where it is now. It went through our neighbours to the south and around to avoid the lake.

AK: Oh, yeah. You were saying there's a Kimura Lake that's dried up.

CK: Yes. This is the Kimura Lake. It was a 200-acre lake, it was...

AK: Is that out in here?

CK: Mm-hmm. But now it's just bone-dry, I'm afraid.

AK: So, and even then, the road wasn't much of a road either I suppose, it was just...

CK: If you talk to some of the old-timers who used this road in order to get from Redwater to Edmonton, they were telling me many times that their vehicles or wagons got bogged down in the swamp south of us here.

AK: Now, when you first moved in here as a married couple, did you go and shop in Edmonton or did you go to Redwater to do your...

CK: No. Edmonton was practically the other side of the world. We didn't go there unless we went to see a doctor or went to the hospital. Redwater of course was...

JK: Oh, Redwater, by the way, was just a flag station.

AK: That's right. There were 99 people there according to Anne Key.

JK: And Opal was the town at that time. Probably you know all about Opal, do you?

AK: Well, I don't know that much except that there...

JK: Opal was the biggest town around this area. They had a full-sized station and it had five implement... hotel, two elevators, post office.

CK: Grocery store.

JK: What do you call it? Implement...

AK: Yeah, implement dealer.

JK: Two blacksmith, four stores. It was the biggest town in this area. And when the oil boom came, everything shifted to Redwater.

AK: And have you any idea why that was? Why Imperial didn't choose Opal to expand its operations?

JK: Well, I think you could get a better story from the people more than I, but the rumours were that Egremont was supposed to have been the highlight of the ??? But for some reason or another, I guess Redwater became more centralized, I presume. They were able to find more oil towards the south than the northern area. So, I guess that was the reason why.

AK: I'm just going to turn the tape over here. I can see we're getting pretty close to...

JK: The end?

AK: Well, no we're...

Side 2 – 25:19

[00:00:03] AK: Talking about Opal as the real centre of activity in this area. But Redwater got chosen over, actually over Egremont. But what I...

JK: ??? see it's because of the...

[tape cuts]

[00:00:24] AK: Let's just... we've got kind of an impression from you Chizuko about the activity. What was your impression, Jim, when you heard about Hilton Cook having a well on his farm? Did you have...?

JK: Well, we were all hoping that we could get oil on our places too. Because, you know, it would be quite a lift for the farmers.

AK: Did you check the title of your property to see whether you had in fact, or you may have had in fact mineral rights?

JK: No. I think people came around asking those questions. But they found out that there was no surface rights.

AK: No mineral rights.

JK: No mineral rights.

AK: Well, did you make any effort to check to see if...?

JK: No.

AK: Did you feel that you might have been shortchanged by not having your mineral rights?

JK: No.

AK: Okay. So, your big concern was the first six inches of soil, would that be putting it about right?

JK: Yes.

AK: Okay. So, let's talk to you, Jim, about your going to work for a construction company in Redwater.

JK: Yeah. My first job was... how can I put it? Well, our farm wasn't big enough to support the two families. So, therefore I chose, and in Opal, when the oil field jobs came up, I went to work in the oil field. My first job was with Maloney's Garage, then I worked with the...

AK: What year was that?

JK: 1950.

AK: Oh. So, you didn't get into the oil patch until 1950, then? For the first two years you didn't...?

JK: The first job I got with the oil was with Eldorado, a construction company.

AK: And what did they, what was their job?

JK: Well, maintenance work. Cleaning up, cutting brush, doing oilfield maintenance work. Cleaning up oil spills, making firewalls and setting up tanks and batteries.

AK: And that company was...?

JK: Eldorado.

AK: Eldorado. I didn't know that. And what was your pay? How much an hour did you get?

JK: I started off with a dollar... ninety cents. But my first cheque they gave me a dollar an hour because I was pretty good, they said. I worked faithfully with them.

AK: Gee, great, eh? That's great.

JK: 10 cents. And I worked for a dollar an hour ever since until I, oh, different raises came up, I think I ended up with a dollar and a half an hour. And then I got a job with Pacific Petroleums.

AK: Do you remember who hired you?

JK: In Eldorado?

AK: No, at Pacific.

JK: Ellard. What was his... Reg Ellard.

AK: Reg Ellard.

JK: Yeah, that's right.

AK: And he was kind of a production foreman out here?

JK: Yeah, I think so.

AK: And then you...?

JK: I think the engineer at that time was Macintosh.

AK: Yeah. Al Macintosh. Yeah, Al later went to great heights. You probably knew that. He became the head of Home Oil.

JK: Oh, is that right?

AK: Oh, big wheel. But at that time when you went to work for Pacific, you were a battery operator?

JK: Went in as a construction man, then went to battery operator about a year or two later, yes. Then lived on the battery for five years.

AK: You lived there?

JK: On the lease. At that time all the battery operators lived on the lease.

AK: And you worked 24 hours?

JK: Well, more or less yes.

AK: I see. Well, what about Chizuko? What'd you do with her? Did you bring her out?

JK: She went to the battery to live with us. Well, Pacific had all residential battery operators anyways.

AK: Oh, I see. So, there wasn't any shift work?

JK: Yes, there was. For the night shift we took turns. We were responsible for our own batteries, but then at the same time there was, we went around in a group, eh? To do maintenance work.

AK: Oh. Like cleaning up or painting?

JK: Yeah, painting and the production end of it.

AK: Yeah right. Reworking wells? Did you have to do...?

JK: When the roads were bad, or they couldn't come, I guess we were more or less responsible for our own lease.

AK: I see. So, you, for all practical purposes, you lived right out there then.

JK: That's right.

AK: And what kind of a dwelling place did you have?

CK: It was livable.

JK: Livable.

AK: Livable. Ha, ha. Was it two rooms or...?

CK: No, there were three rooms, but we had to bring our water in.

JK: There was no water facilities. So, we hauled all our water by cream can from town.

AK: Well, by that time the town had got water.

JK: Oh yes.

AK: They had a bad time getting water, you know. I don't know if you knew that. Because the wells weren't big enough. And how long did this job go along with Pacific then?

JK: Battery operator?

AK: Yeah. And...

JK: About five years. Oh, they were long before that. It was about... oh, I don't know. They always had residential operators.

AK: Yeah, well that's interesting. I didn't know that. You see, a lot of the other companies had shift work. They'd have a, they'd drive out and change...

JK: That's Imperial Oil. But all the small, independent companies, I'm sure it was all residential operators.

AK: Is that right? How many wells did you have to look after?

JK: I was looking after six.

AK: Six wells. Is that down at the south end of the field or the north end?

JK: Just two miles out of town.

AK: North?

JK: South. Southeast.

AK: Oh, yeah. We'll look at a map in a minute. I'll show you, I'll give you a map. So, when did you stop working for Pacific?

JK: Well, soon after that, after about five years they did away with the residential operators, and so I came back home to live here and...

CK: They wanted you to go to Drayton Valley.

JK: And then they wanted me to go to Drayton Valley. So, at that time my dad was getting pretty old and I helped him farm right along, put the crop in and help him take the crop off. But he was getting pretty old, so when they asked me to go to Drayton Valley, yeah, Drayton Valley, I turned them down and then I went back to work on construction again.

AK: With this...?

JK: Tartan.

AK: Oh, with Tartan. Well, that'd be McDonald then, eh?

JK: That's right.

AK: Burt McDonald?

JK: That's right.

AK: Did you...?

JK: I was the first foreman for Burt McDonald.

AK: Is that right?

JK: Well, not the first. There was another one, another Frenchman. He was the first, and I was about the second or third foreman for Burt McDonald when he was starting up.

AK: Oh. What year would this be approximately?

CK: We came back to the farm in 1960.

JK: About '53, I guess.

CK: We came back to the farm in 1960. So, was it after that?

JK: Oh, no. I started up, way ahead of my time. I helped them start up the business in '53. And then I went and worked for Pacific Petroleums. Because I was out in the oil field for 15 years. But Burt started his business up I think around '52.

AK: Yeah. Well, you see, he'd been working, doing a lot of work for Imperial Oil.

JK: Well, he was field foreman for Imperial Oil. And then he went on his own, started up Tartan Transport.

AK: Did you know that he was pretty handy with his fists?

JK: Yep. He was an amateur during the War, I guess he was...

AK: Yeah, he was some kind of a champion.

JK: Yeah. That's right. But he's ???

AK: He spends all his time down in Arizona now.

JK: Right now?

AK: And his former wife Eleanor, I'm supposed to meet her tomorrow or Tuesday.

JK: She'll have lots of good stories to tell you, eh? Probably nobody wants to give their complete stories though, would they? They hesitate to give it.

AK: Well, you see, Jim's hitting the kernel of this whole problem. What I try to do as politely as I can, is to find out as much as I can about these people. Now one of my oldest friends was over yesterday.

[tape cuts]

[00:10:11] AK: When you moved back to the farm, then you...

JK: We're getting way ahead of ourselves.

CK: This is 1960.

AK: Yeah, 1960.

JK: Oh, we're talking about 1960?

AK: Yeah. So, had you pretty well given up on the oil patch then?

JK Yeah, I left Pacific Petroleum in '61, wasn't it? And then I went back to the oil fields as a construction job because, well, it was hard times, eh? You know, we just got started farming. Dad wasn't... Dad was still farming at...

AK: He was getting on in years.

JK: Yeah, he quit farming in 1964 and he was already 80 years old.

AK: Oh boy, yeah.

JK: He went into farming, active farming in '27. And we farmed together, well, I shouldn't say together. I stayed with Dad, worked for him until we got married in '46. And then we worked together, after we got married we worked together for four years, until '50. But actually, we worked together for two years. Oh, you getting all this on tape?

AK: Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.

CK: You're not going to say anything about your company?

AK: Did you have a company?

JK: Yeah.

AK: Oh. What did you call it?

JK: Mahon and Kimura Construction.

AK: May and Kimura?

CK: Mahon. M-A-H-O-N. Mahon.

AK: Oh, M-A-H-O-N.

JK: Yeah. Johnny Mahon and... can't remember.

AK: What'd you have, a couple of...?

JK: ??? was in at...to begin with.

AK: And what'd you have, a couple of Cats? Did you have some Cats?

JK: No, no.

AK: Caterpillar tractors?

JK: Just maintenance work.

AK: Oh, I see. And you'd go around to the different batteries?

JK: That's right. Cleaning up and building batteries and so forth. But I got in with the wrong partner. So, we folded up after a year and a half.

AK: A lot of those partners...

JK: But did very well for the year that I was in. Pardon?

AK: You dissolved the company then, eh?

JK: Yeah after... well, it got to that, you know, he was drinking, my partner was drinking and then he started to... the winter the jobs got scarce, so he started to ask me for money. So, I said, well, instead of doing that, I told we might as well dissolve the company, so we did.

AK: It's terrible some of these... and you know, there was such wonderful opportunities to make a good decent living if you were sober, and you were a hard-working sober person, I can tell that.

JK: That's right.

AK: Well then, can we... yeah, that was a little episode then. You could call that a little episode in your life. The School of Hard Knocks.

JK: Also went in trucking, but then I got another wrong partner. So, folded that up. But anyways.

AK: But you've... this is the best partner of all right here.

JK: That's right. The most successful.

AK: Yeah, I'll say.

JK: The other two, just nothing but a burden.

CK: Well, we just heard lately, just not too long ago we visited this trucker partner's parents. And this friend is doing very well in Salt Lake. So, that's nice to know. The trucker partner.

[00:14:28] AK: Well then, after all this, when could you say that your time had come to an end with the oil business? What year?

JK: In 1964.

AK: '64, that was it.

JK: Yeah. Dad retired. He said, and I don't know if his goal was 80 years, but anyway, he retired at 80 and I bought him out. He sold the farm very reasonable to me. So, I took over the farm and he made two trips to Japan and he lived in retirement just a half-mile west of here.

AK: In a retirement home?

JK: No, no. On the farm.

AK: Oh, on the farm. Did he have any help there with him?

CK: No.

AK: He was by himself?

CK: Well, your mother.

AK: Oh, and your mother was still alive too?

JK: Yeah, Mother passed away two years after Dad. Mother passed away in '77, my dad passed away in '75.

AK: And how old was she when she died?

JK: My mother?

AK: Yeah.

JK: My dad was 91, my mother was 87.

AK: Longevity there. Yes. So, that means you're going to live on for another 20, 30 years, is that right? You get the right genes?

JK: As far as the genes go, maybe. But I don't think I will, I don't think I'm...

CK: As long as we're healthy, we don't mind living until 100 and something.

AK: No, I'll say.

JK: That's right. As long as you've got the health, you don't mind living until 100. But if you haven't, it's better to...

CK: Jim retired in '78 from farming. Active farming.

AK: Yeah, I see. And then, since then you've rented out the land, eh?

CK: We've made two trips to Japan.

AK: With your, with Jim's parents?

CK: Just the two of us.

AK: Oh, just the two of you.

CK: Jim's folks visited Japan on their own, a couple of times.

AK: Yeah. Well now, would they go right back to their...?

CK: Mm-hmm. Home town, home country, home place.

AK: Right. Now which island was that?

CK: Kyushu, Japan.

AK: Kyushu.

CK: The southernmost island.

AK: K-Y-U-...

CK: S-H-U.

AK: Yeah, Kyushu.

CK: It's a beautiful part of the country.

AK: It's almost tropical, isn't it?

CK: Mm-hmm.

AK: Right. A lot of people don't know that the string of islands, you know, they go for hundreds of miles, don't they? And would there be some element of going back to, like your father and mother, going back to where their ancestors were? Is there a feeling of kinship with ancestors?

CK: Very much so. We were told of different uncles and aunts and cousins, but it's almost impossible to remember them all without seeing them. But once we got to Japan, we were overwhelmed by all the relatives we had over there. They all came out of the woodwork, so to speak.

AK: Isn't that wonderful, eh?

CK: We had a wonderful time.

AK: And did you go right back to where your parents had come from?

CK: Mm-hmm. Yes, we visited the ancestral graves of our parents and grandparents. We were shown different interesting places, historical places. It was very interesting. We'd like to go there again, but it's so expensive to go to Japan.

AK: Oh, yeah. With the yen the way it is. When was the last time you...?

CK: 1984.

AK: '84. Well it wasn't too bad then.

CK: It wasn't too bad.

AK: It's just done nothing but go up. You know, everything is very expensive, so. And you would travel what, by Japan Airlines?

CK: Canadian. Or we went once by JAL. And then the next time by...

[00:19:13] AK: Right. So, I'd like to get from both of you some kind of an indication of your philosophy of life as it pertains to the Redwater area and the times you've had here and the many friends you've made. I know that you have lots of friends. Anne Key for one. So, Jim, can I get maybe a few well chosen words from you?

JK: I'll put it this way, I think we were, I think I'm very fortunate to have lived in this area. The people were all very friendly, even during the War years. And lived through the Depression years. We never knew what Depression was, because we were all poor. And I enjoyed my sports. I played baseball and had great times with a lot of people. And life was good to me. And most of all, was lucky to have met her and raised three good children, so I think life was very good to me.

AK: How about you, Chizuko?

CK: Yes, I'd like to add to what Jim said. We're certainly grateful for the friendship that we've been enjoying in the Redwater area. We're just one of the many, always included in activities there. We are blessed with good health, three good children all healthy and in good jobs. Three nice grandchildren. And we are certainly living in a wonderful era. I think our parents have enjoyed that the most, which was...

JK: And another thing, we were very fortunate to have the oil come to Redwater, as it's brought a lot of employment and good times and so forth.

AK: Yeah. You know, one of the things I note, one of the themes that's running through my head... I don't know where I'll put it in the book, but, you know, before Redwater, it was a farming community. Kind of a quiet farming community. And when Redwater hit, there was a tremendous influx of other people. But then, just like you, you're a good example and Vic Pasemko, and these other ones I've talked about, went out and got jobs. But then when the 1952 and the drilling stopped and everything settled down, you know, there was a lot of the farmers that returned to their farms. And you also ultimately did, it took you a little longer. It was about the same time for Victor because, you see, he worked with the pipeline.

JK: He did pipelines for those years.

AK: Yeah, he worked... he got transferred into the gas plant and he had enough of that, he wanted to get the hell out of there. So, he just walked away from it. But it's interesting that, you know, before there was this placid farming, and then the oil boom, and now the field is just about finished, you know, there's hardly any oil left in it. And now we're back to kind of a farming community with very little of the impact left on the farmers except what they may have made. And the other thing, there's been kind of a crop, and you didn't get this crop, but a lot of the farmers had a crop every year, an assured crop every year about the rentals on their production sites and well sites. So, they, you know, they'd get money every year. So, that was a form of income.

JK: Oh, yes. Those that had oil on their place were very fortunate because they had the steady income.

AK: Yeah, the rental income on the use of the land. Did you ever hear about any other farmers selling their land, selling their farms to the oil companies?

JK: Not really.

AK: Some of them did.

JK: Yes, I believe so, yes.

CK: And the fertilizer plant.

JK: I'm just trying to think. The fertilizer plant sale, they're the biggest winners, I guess those that sold their land to the fertilizer plant, they got somewhere in the six-figures anyways, I think.

AK: Is that right?

JK: Some of them got a million dollars, from what I hear.

AK: But it ruined the soil. It's ruined everything down there, you know. That, all that gypsum and everything else has poisoned the soil, you know, it'll never be returned to farming.

JK: Is that right?

AK: However, that's another point. Well, I wanted to thank you both very much for allowing me into your home and visiting with you and getting an insight from your community.

JK: When you get the book, I'd like to read it.

AK: Oh, well, I'll see that you. I don't know, it'll be sometime next year. So, it's now six o'clock, so I'll sign off and once again, thanks very much.

CK: It's been a pleasure, thank you.

End of Interview