

**Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**  
**Oral History Interview**

Interviewees: Lorne Bantle and Dwight Krislock

Interviewer:

Date:

Location:

Index: Machinist, training to be a machinist, skilled trades at Celanese, working conditions at Celanese, health and safety, impact of Celanese on the environment, working in a unionized workplace, relationship between the union and management, social aspect of working at Celanese, layoffs, plant closure, plant productivity, anti-unionism attitude in Alberta

LB: My name's Lorne Bantle. I worked at Celanese Canada for 18 years, from November '87 until shutdown. I worked there as a machinist. I was given the opportunity to choose which aspect of work I wanted to do. I chose milling, because love to mill. So I spent most of my time on milling machines there. We did some PSV work, basically went down to building new projects for the operations, and repair work.

DK: My name is Dwight Krislock. I hired on with Celanese in August of '81 and worked there until March of this year, 2007 – so 25 years. I worked in the machine shop the whole time. As Lorne said, we were a repair facility where we just fixed things that needed fixing. A machinist is a good part of some of these repairs. We did all kinds of valve work, like he mentioned, the safety valves and other kinds of valves, gate valves and ball valves and control valves, and all kinds of different valves would come into our shop for repair and whatnot.

Q: How is a machinist important to the operation of a chemical plant?

LB: Well, in a plant like that, they really can't afford to have somebody outside the plant do the work, for the simple reason that it's too costly and they will be caught with their pants down when something breaks down. So they hire what they feel is qualified people to do the job. They had some entrance requirements, and that was you had to be a journeyman machinist with a red seal standing. They preferred if you had another trade, but at that time when I was hired on they were happy with that. The reason why they hire people that are qualified (and they really don't like apprentices unless they apprentice people inside their shop) is so that they don't have to baby sit them. When a job comes in the guys know what to do, and you start building the product that needs to be done.

Q: So what kinds of products needed to be done?

DK: Well actually when you put together all the different units, as you've heard from all these other people, the plant had all these different units with different acronyms to

describe what chemical or whatever it was they made. But every one of those units was a collection of piping and turbines and compressors and pumps and conveyors and all that sort of thing. Some of the units you could walk through and you wouldn't know the thing was even running, whereas other units you could walk through there and see all kinds of wheels turning and things happening. So any time there's a big collection of mechanical anything going on, you're gonna need a lot of millwrights and mechanics and other tradespeople. But as machinists, Lorne and I, along with the other guys in the group, would be sort of a support. They would never know when they were going to need us. To plan a shutdown, or turnaround, as they call them nowadays, but to plan one of those things they would never know what our workload was going to be, because we would just be there to bail them out of different situations. If something breaks that needs to be fixed that they don't have a part for, we would fix it or make new ones and so on. So basically with that much mechanical equipment, you need people who can either repair parts or make new parts.

Q: Tell the school children who will be watching this what a machinist actually needs to know. It's a skilled trade. What is there about it that's skilled? What does a journeyman have to be able to do that's so very special?

DK: Well nowadays there's a lot of computerized machine tools. In fact my son sells that stuff. So when you break down what the computer does for the machine tools, basically what the old fashioned machinists like Lorne and I are, we're kind of a dying breed because we just do everything with our brain as opposed to... So we get along with a manual machine much the same way as a computer gets along with a computerized machine. The machine will sit there and do nothing unless him and I come along and start it up, whereas nowadays a lot of this is computerized. But the type of work that we do will likely never be taken over entirely by computerized equipment, because there's just some things you just can't do that way.

Q: What do you do with the metal?

LB: Well you get a feeling for metal. When you're in this trade for a certain length of time you get a real feeling for metal, and you know how it reacts to cutting. That's what we do with metal – we cut it. Either we cut it, grind it, saw it or weld it. And we really don't weld, because we're not welders. But we take the metal and turn it into a finished product. Let's say if you needed a drive shaft or any kind of shaft, maybe it's got a gear on the end or maybe it's blind or whatever, we would shape that metal into something that is useful. That's as basic as you can get.

DK: And there's an old saying, when you start out on a job you've got this really intricate part that you need to make. Then you've got your block of steel or bar of steel or whatever it might be. It's an old joke where you'd say that the part that I'm wanting is inside there already, we know it's inside of this block. But we just have to do what's necessary to get that part to come out of there. It obviously doesn't happen by magic, but...

LB: For the student that wants to know about machining, he has to be able to have the ability to see the product before you do it. It's that simple. It's already built before you

make it. When you look at a piece or you need a piece to be made, it's already built before you turn the steel, before you even start to cut it. Then it automatically happens.

Q: For someone who wants to go into the machinist trade, how many hours of training is he looking at?

DK: I think technically you can't enter into an apprenticeship in this trade without having grade 10. But realistically you'd need a minimum of grade 12, and then have reasonable mathematics skills. To be somewhat mechanically minded would be good, although I've known people who were not very mechanical at all and ended up being machinists, like my son for example. He never fixed his bike, and all of a sudden tells me that he's going to become a machinist, and he did.

Q: What is the training program for a machinist?

LB: There is a four 8-week training, eight weeks once a year for four years. Then after that the rest is a lifetime career. You're not a machinist when you walk out the 4<sup>th</sup> year. Some are exceptional, but to be a machinist, the art has to be in you and you have to develop it. The only way you can develop it is, well one of the best ways to develop that machining art is to get into a repair shop where you're making something every day. That's where the art becomes a reality.

DK: And actually when you become a journeyman you're only really a qualified beginner at that state. You spend a long time getting to be somewhat beyond journeyman.

LB: Another thing that would be really important for people, who are interested, is you have to start young. You start that business young, you don't start it old. They don't become good tradespeople, they just don't have the art, they don't have it in them.

Q: Describe some of the other skilled trades that were employed at Celanese.

LB: For some reason over there at Celanese there seemed to be a real good group of personalities. That was one thing that was there. Every trade had their own personality, which we found out. We talked about that many times, Dwight and I. Certain people for instrumentation, they were a certain type of person. You could tell that, it was so obvious that a certain, they all belonged in their own class. The electricians were great. As far as electrical people over there, they were all very highly trained and highly skilled. In ever trade that I know of over there at Celanese, all the people were highly trained. One thing about it was Celanese gave you an opportunity to upgrade on a continuous basis. They allowed so much cash a year, I forget what it was. But you could upgrade if you wanted to. To break down the trades and actually tell you what they're made up of ...

Q: Just name a couple of other trades, if you could.

LB: The carpenters were in there, the welders. The welders, boilermakers, sheet metal people, millwrights and riggers. They were all class people in their trades.

Q: When the company decided to put in a new unit of production, a new line of product or whatever, did they involved you people at all in that kind of planning that goes on?

DK: We didn't really get involved much with the actual production of product. But at the same time Lorne and I were involved in different upgrades of product, like in the cigarette filter manufacturing process. Lorne and I were both involved in projects that they had to improve the product and to change different sizes of it and stuff like that. They involved us in those sorts of things because they needed to, but as far as production stuff, we were never really consulted about new products and stuff.

Q: What about contracting? Did they contract out? When did they bring in contractors?

LB: During shutdowns they'd bring in contractors. There was the odd contractor there all the time. Brand was contractor, I think Brand Scaffolding was contracting. They were contractors and they were there all the time to set up scaffolding. Let's say you had to change out piping system over a big boiler or whatever. The scaffolders would build up all the scaffolding, put everything in. Then when it was safe to go in, the guys would go in and change out the piping. That's what they did there.

DK: Then they had other contractors that were mainly into pipefitting and welding and that sort of thing, when the need arose. But in our line of work, about the only contractors that ever came onsite were related to portable machining, where you may be hanging on the side of a tower or something like that, re-facing a man-way gasket cover or something. They hired people to do that type of work. As far as contracting out, we would take jobs downtown to have them done, if we were too busy or if was beyond the capability of our shop, machine-wise. There wasn't any contracting onsite in our line of work other than the portable stuff.

Q: They pretty well kept the work in-house?

LB: Ya. We built a lot of prototypes for them. When they wanted to change something, they'd come down to the machine shop and say, hey boys, maybe you could build this. A lot of times we had to change the drawings because stuff wouldn't work. But then that's engineers; engineers design things perfect, so they think. But they don't work in reality; we know that from experience. So there's a lot of changes.

DK: Then there was times too when we would make prototypes for people that were trying to think of different ways of doing things. Then they would contract it out to make hundreds more of the same thing that we had made the first one of.

Q: Tell me about the conditions of working in that plant. Describe the working conditions and tell me what it was like working at Celanese. What was so good about it?

LB: What was so good about it? First of all, right from the day I started there, I wasn't really too sure whether I wanted to stay there when I first stepped into that window. We had a foreman there that I personally didn't like. I confronted him and told him what I thought of him. He got pretty angry and red and spit a lot. So after I had that discussion

with him, he only lasted 2 years this foreman. Then we got the gem of a fellow that we all died for. We went from the worst to the best.

Q: Tell me about a good foreman.

LB: Tom Cordal was an exceptional man. As far as he was concerned, he let you have complete control over your work. He gave you a job; if you asked a question about it he said, you know how to do it, don't ask me. It was that simple. He'd just say, go ahead, do whatever you have to do. When you're allowed to create, when you're allowed to do what you want to do in a machine shop, then your job automatically becomes so much easier. He was the type of man, if you didn't feel well he didn't expect from you. He did everything in his power to help you out and get over your humps and bumps. He always said, if a rush job comes in, that's all I want is that job done. If we don't have a rush job coming through that door, you just work at your own pace, don't worry about it. That makes a happy and beautiful environment. That man, we had him for 10 years. He was 10 years our foreman; those were good years.

DK: Another thing he said, he called us all in the office shortly after he took over the job. He set out as one of his goals was to have us all sitting around with nothing to do. He wanted us to be just all like the Maytag repairman, everything's all done and perfect. A lot of foremen would never be able to embrace that sort of logic at all. They figure you've gotta be going hammer and tongs all the time. But with him, his goal was to have us sitting around with nothing to do. That would've meant that we'd done a good job. It never got to that point, obviously, but it was interesting to note that the foreman had that as one of his goals.

LB: He was also a guy that had no problem spending money in the shop. If you needed something he'd try his very best to get it in there. We had a lot of nice equipment by the time he left.

DK: The guy before was almost like a curator of a museum. We had a very old poorly equipped machine shop, full of machines that were tired and worn out. This guy systematically went about changing them all out for new ones. Even as it sits today, there's nobody there, but it's a well equipped machine shop.

Q: It seems to me it wasn't one of those sweatshops where they keep the workforce down to a bare minimum so that everybody's gotta jump. Did you people, in your 18 or 25 years, did you encounter any layoffs? Do you recall people being laid off when the work was slow?

LB: Never when the work was slow. The only time they started laying off is when they weren't telling us the truth that they were going to shut it down, and they started weaseling off people. They started laying them off in sections. All of a sudden these two had to go, then all of a sudden those two had to go.

Q: We'll get to that in a minute. Let's talk about the good days, the really good days. How many people do you remember being employed there, at the height?

DK: I remember hearing numbers such as 1500 employees, but this was before my time in '81. I really don't know what the numbers would've been, but there was probably 700 or 800 people working there when I was first there. Then of course during the construction of the methanol unit in '81, when I was just hired on there, there was a lot of construction workers there. But the number of other people who would be relying upon Celanese as secondary type workers, it would be hundreds more beyond that.

Q: Describe for the school kids ...

LB: In Envirofuels. They took our methanol. We had forest pipe going straight over to Envirofuels that went 24 hours a day. We were pumping methanol over there.

DK: And there would be everything from the people, like Acklands and so on, who supply nuts and bolts and whatever.

LB: Mid Century Sales, they sold millions of dollars worth of product to us. There was all kinds of people that were selling. There was lumberyards, sponsored lumberyards. People who made fencing, lawn mowers, we bought all those products.

DK: Or all the metal that we needed to do our line of work. The construction type steel, that the riggers and boilermakers would use. There'd be metal suppliers and sheet metal suppliers.

Q: And the transportation people.

DK: Ya, there was always people hauling chemicals out of there.

LB: The railroad company, they made a fortune off of us. I don't remember how many railcars of methanol they would manufacture a day.

DK: Forty cars a day.

LB: So they were always on our property driving their trains in there. Then there was the cafeteria people, you can't forget them. They supplied the food. Caterers would supply food for years and years and years of food to the employees there.

Q: Tell me about the hours of work, the pay, benefits – how satisfied were you with them?

LB: The standing joke was a buck a minute, which we liked very much. When we were making over time, a buck a minute we were working overtime.

Q: Did you work a lot of overtime?

LB: Not a lot. During the one major shutdown we worked an awful lot of overtime. I made 500 hours. That was in '91; that was a great year. I enjoyed doing that 500 hours. But as far as pay was concerned, I felt that we were competitive. I made fairly good money working for Celanese. I was kind of happy with it. Sure, it's always nice to have

extra dollars more, but we were always above the rest. I know when I compare it to Sherrit. I had a friend that worked at Sherrit all the years while I worked at Celanese. I was always making more money than he was. We were always making more money, they never caught up. We had better benefits than they did. Towards the end Celanese was just on par, but they weren't up there. I felt that they could've done better towards the end.

Q: But in the heyday, just describe for the school kids some of the benefits that you received from working there.

DK: If you didn't work in a plant environment, you'd always be about \$5 or \$6 if not \$7 more an hour. That would be one benefit working for a big manufacturing plant. The other thing would be your health benefits. Dental and health were always fairly good as far as I was concerned.

Q: They paid for the benefits?

DK: They paid for the benefits.

LB: There's a lot more training involved when you work for a big plant environment. I shouldn't say all of them do, but the ones that are generous with regards to giving training, they'll fit you out with all the training, like confined spaces, fall protection, forklift training, all kinds of safety courses. If the company is worth working for, they will give you all the necessary tools you need as far as keeping yourself safe, and not losing limbs or killing yourself.

Q: What did you find about the health and safety record there?

DK: Along the lines of the other question you were saying, I was going to add that in Edmonton there's probably somewhere around 300 other machine shops, places to work. So as far as the benefits and that kind of thing, a place like this is, none of the other non union places are gonna be like that. Not necessarily the union part of it, but just the big plant environment like Lorne was alluding to. As far as safety goes, they kind of promote a culture of safety. After you've worked there for a lot of years, you just get to know that every step that you take had better be thought out, whatever it is you're going to do. Like you're going to go and grab a piece of material off the rack and put it in the saw and saw it up, or you're going to walk across the street to do something over there. Everything you do, it's expected of you to do it in a safe way. It just becomes second nature after a while. Companies like Celanese, their record was just phenomenal. In the end, after having a whole bunch of people that didn't quit, the turnover was almost nothing. They treat you in such a way that you want to stay working there. But then as time goes on, year after year you've got another year of working in a safe environment, and it just becomes a natural thing to expect to do your work safely. And it works.

Q: What about the environmental record?

LB: Well, they were doing test wells when I left there. They had hit acetic acid at 97 feet. That's a tough one to put on record here. It's still there. What they did was, a lot of the other test wells that they put in, they started to pump out. They had a seepage out at

the riverbank where there was brown stuff coming out of the river walls. The environment got hold of that and traced it back into Celanese property. So from what I understand, they drilled wells and started flushing out the ground. They were pumping chemical out of the ground, and water that needed to be retreated, put through the recycling again and then back into the river. They've done that for years, until they started to have clean water again. Then they got rid of a lot of that sludge. I wasn't there in the beginning, but apparently in the beginning it was pretty rough.

DK: That's what I was going to say too. The plant started in the early '50s, and apparently in that first 15 years or so there was some god awful things happening with regard to effluent heading to the river and so on. Even when I started there in '81, we had one unit known as ET, which stood for Effluent Treatment. So when I got there in '81 they didn't have an ET plant, an ET unit. We were talking about these safety valves earlier. Well when I got there they used to take a hose and a steam line, like water and steam mixed together, and put these valves out on the street out in front of the shop, and just wash all these dastardly chemicals out onto the pavement. Into the gutter they went and down to the river they went. There was no effluent treatment in those days. That was just a minor amount of chemical coming out of each of these valves that was being washed; but even a few years later that would be unheard of to be doing anything like that. ... I would guess that when then started in 1952 they didn't have any concept of how nasty this stuff was, so they didn't treat it with much respect. Then knowledge was gained and practices changed, to the point where when we left there it was probably quite good compared to what went on in the early days. But then they had these deep wells, which none of us seemed to know what they pumped down there. There were these big caverns down underneath the plant, which was a dumping ground for all kinds of nasty stuff that went down. We don't even know what the hell went down there. We weren't operation people, Lorne and I.

Q: What were those caverns?

LB: They really weren't caverns. Apparently, according to the way it was described by the geologists that did the work, was there's a limestone block that runs from Edmonton to Drumheller to Medicine Hat, underground about a mile deep. A mile or mile and a half deep these wells are. They pumped the acidic water into these blocks of limestone. Their theory was they'd neutralize each other. But there is caverns too that they were pumping stuff into, but they tried to soak it into that block. It would cost too much to refine the water and put the water back into the river. Then that all had to change later on. All refinery row had deep wells into that block. All the big plants down west of Sherwood Park, they all drilled into the big block.

Q: Maybe that partially explains why they're situated where they are.

LB: It could be.

Q: How did people in the plant feel about the union?

DK: Actually, I would say that a very small minority of the people were really active union members. I've always been a union member and I like the idea of working in a

union shop. You get paid better, you get all the benefits, you get this and that. Who would want to do it the other way if you've got the choice of getting all this? But on the other hand, most people, including me, weren't all that active. I was never a shop steward or on the executive or anything like that. But I've always been a supportive member. I support the union to the extent that I wouldn't want to go to work non-union instead of union. So I would think that probably 50 or 60% of the union members would fall into the apathetic type of category like I was in. But then there was a group of people who were quite active and go to all the meetings and so on.

Q: Do some names stand out?

DK: Cec Kereluk was the president for a while, and Bob Allen was the president for a good while. Reg Jerome.

Q: When was Bob the president?

DK: He would've been about 7 or 8 years ago.

Q: Do you think he's still in Edmonton?

DK: No he's not, he died. He's no longer with us.

Q: Who else stands out?

DK: Carol Stewart. Carol was there for a long time.

LB: For a lot of years she was on the executive.

Q: Do you agree with his assessment of how people related to the union?

LB: Ya I do actually. I never was an active member, I mean I was an active paying member and I supported the union in every way I could, but sometimes I didn't feel that they were quite that fair. It could be misunderstanding too. Usually when you come down to a problem, 90% of the time it's just a misunderstanding. You'd think sometimes that there was favoritism going on with regards to union executives and management. You always got that underlying problem. A lot of times they would get favored positions with regards to a promotion or something like that. If they're too doggone good in the union they'd be taken out and promoted to management.

Q: That's just the opposite of what people think happens to union people.

DK: That's right, it is.

LB: When you get a real sharp guy in the union, they're gonna move on to the management side. Who was that guy, the finance fellow, I can't remember his name. He was looking after the local there, and they moved him into the ivory tower. He's the guy that helped Reg Kostash figure out his retirement so he could get the hell out.

Q: Was there times when you people had to support the union, when there was friction from management?

DK: Actually, I came from a mining background before I worked there. I was with the United Steel Workers in northern Manitoba. There was always an air of confrontation between the company and the union, to the point where the company didn't want even their low level supervision to be mingling with the union guys off the job. When I came to Celanese, I found it to be quite a dramatic shift in the other direction, where there was not an air of confrontation, there was more of an air of cooperation. It wasn't always like that, but...

Q: Any events? Wasn't there a strike at one point or a wildcat or something?

DK: The weekend that I hired on, on the weekend of August 4<sup>th</sup>, '81 there was a wildcat walkout a couple days before I hired on there. I wasn't able to make it to work on the day that I was supposed to be my first day. The way it was put to me was, well it's just as well you didn't get here that day anyway, because we had this incident. There again, it was a big misunderstanding, from what I can gather since. There was a couple of people that blew up over something or other, and everybody followed behind. But I don't remember any big confrontations. We didn't have any walkouts or anything after that for 25 years, so things were pretty smooth.

LB: As far as I was concerned, they were actually very good as far as how they treated the people. They were.

Q: What about the social life? How much did you people see of each other?

DK: Well actually I did some socializing with a few guys there. We went on fishing trips together and stuff like that, but not a lot. We did have some, like I would get involved with some of the department's golf tournaments and the golf leagues and so on, which Lorne wasn't in on because he's not a golfer. But then I went on a few fishing trips with a few friends and so on. So some socializing with the guys, but not a whole lot.

Q: I guess the trades people didn't socialize as much as the people....?

DK: I think that's probably true. And then with Lorne and my line of work there as machinists, it's not a lot of teamwork involved there. You normally get a problem of your own and you deal with it; you're working on your own more or less. Whereas other trades groups, like electricians, will go out in teams. The sheet metal guys, there was a couple of different groups there that were stuck together at the hip. Or the millwrights, they would always go in teams of 2 or 3 or 4 out to fix something. But in our case, what we did, there's only room for one guy to operate a particular machine. So basically we were more individuals than the other guys were.

LB: We definitely led a lonely life. A machinist is a lonely life, there's no getting around it. The only being that you deal with for 8 hours is the machine.

DK: We usually found time for a little visiting during the day.

LB: We had some visiting for sure. We really did have it good there. I felt we had it good; I felt we did.

Q: Talk about when you first started to notice that things were starting to wind down. What was happening?

LB: I started to feel it 5 years before they dropped the axe on me. What I started to notice was they lied to us, bottom line. They would tell us how great everything was going; we would set goal to accomplish certain, say safety standards. The Yankees wanted us to have a certain safety standard, so we beat that safety standard and came in below it with regards to incidents and mishaps and all this kind of crap. Then we didn't get recognized for it because they said they didn't set it low enough.

Q: What years was that happening?

LB: That would be about 3 to 4 years before I quit. I've been out of there 2 years, so around 2000 somewhere. Things like, they were starting to lay off certain people. They would say, oh no the plant's going fine, plant's going fine, no problem. We ain't shutting this down. That's what they were saying. And then more and more people were laid off. Then they said, no it's okay, we're online again. They kept going back and forth, lying to us. If a person understood that and didn't take it to heart, it wasn't a problem. I didn't take it to heart. I don't think Dwight did either. We didn't take it to heart, because rumors were so bad there in the last 4 years that everything as far as I was concerned, if I didn't see somebody doing it, it didn't happen.

Q: What makes you say they were lying to you as opposed to just the normal ebb and flow?

LB: Because one day they would say we're on course, the plant's not going to shut down; the next day somebody would get laid off.

Q: Were you noticing that about that time, Dwight?

DK: I can't say as I did. But one thing Lorne said that I totally agree with is you just didn't believe what the hell you heard until you actually seen it happening. That was another thing about this plant life is, we all get to know one another quite a bit better than you would in say a construction setting, where you might know the guy your working with or whatever. But we would spend years with one another, so there was always a certain amount of visiting going on. The rumor mill was getting greased pretty good. There was always room for a new rumor. I agree totally with what he said, where you just couldn't believe anything until it actually happened. But I think we knew for quite a few years that things were winding down. I personally believe that, as we were talking about earlier, the contaminated ground, I kind of wonder why a corporation would leave a goose that's laying golden eggs, why would you kick that goose off of the nest? They were making millions of dollars. ... They talk about globalization and the distance from tide water that Edmonton is, which is a factor when it comes to shipping products to your end users. But I think one of the biggest reasons that Celanese left Edmonton is likely the

contaminated ground. The government of the day right now is more likely to say, thanks for being here all these years and we'll see you later. Whereas if Celanese were to wait for another 10 or 15 years before they decided to leave town, then supposedly they're still on the hook for this contaminated ground, but on the other hand it's nothing like getting out of town before the guns come out.

Q: What's your theory? It's not productivity, it's not safety.

LB: It was a very productive plant. I had heard, again this is the rumor, that the Yankees wanted 15% return on their money, and they weren't getting it. They said, if we don't get 15 cents on the dollar, then we're shutting it down. That's the bottom line. They were getting something like 12% return on their money. The other thing was they had this, on this shutting down process of the plant, they started to cut costs. They introduced, they had to cut \$8 million one year and \$10 million. Remember when they were winding down there? They said they're just cutting costs, they're not shutting the plant down. But in reality, they were actually preparing to do the books. They were cutting; they slashed everything. Every budget that was out there for every unit and ever shop was cut, cut, cut, until the books looked very good. Their idea was to bring it down to that point and then dump it.

Q: How did it affect you as a worker when all this was happening?

LB: It didn't affect my work, but it affected my psychic. You really weren't too sure whether you wanted to retire, because you knew the axe was coming down, it was obvious. So there was a bit of concern about that. I even went and did the millwright ticket so I could stay onboard. If I had my millwright ticket, then I could bump into the millwrights in case the oldest machinist didn't retire. So there was an effect on me at that time, to stay onboard.

DK: Ya, the pressure was on pretty good for a while. Like Lorne said, there was one guy who was the most senior in our group. We were a union shop, so the most seniority, and if you're qualified and got the seniority, you're the guy. It doesn't matter if you're any good at doing the work or not. Like Lorne said, he undertook getting his millwright ticket just so he would be able to bump into a different trade group. He had more seniority, so he did do that. I subsequently did that too. But I had a more comfortable setup in there, because once the guy who was the most senior guy took a voluntary severance package, then I was the most senior guy. I knew that all these other guys were going to get laid off, and I wasn't getting any comfort out of seeing these guys getting laid off either. But I knew that as the most senior guy and still qualified, that I would be, and sure as hell that's what happened. The last year and a little bit, I was the only guy there.

Q: So how long did you last? In the history of the plant, how long were you there?

DK: I was there from 1981 until March of '07, 25-1/2 years.

Q: When did you people know for sure that the end had come?

DK: I guess I got my 3 months notice prior to my layoff date. Initially my layoff date was going to be February 28<sup>th</sup>, so 3 months prior to that is when I got my layoff notice.

Q: So you got it in 2006?

DK: Ya, 3 months prior to February 28<sup>th</sup>. But also our union contract was coming due that very day; that was going to be the last day of our current contract, then the company was going to lay off a whole bunch more people at the end of March. So the union said, well this is not really fair to be laying these guys off under these circumstances, and then potentially a new raise in pay and everything under a new contract for these group that are being laid off a month later. So the company agreed and said, ya that's probably true, so we'll give these guys that are on February 28<sup>th</sup>, we'll give them the option to stay another month if they want. So I just figured, I'm not doing anything in March anyway, I may as well stay. I liked my job anyway. But as it turned out it was a mistake, because the guys who left on February 28<sup>th</sup> were allowed to buy their tools for 10 cents on the dollar and all that kind of stuff. Like Lorne, you bought all your tools.

LB: I bought about \$5,000 worth.

DK: Ya. So I had quite a bit more than that set aside. I think I might've had maybe \$15,000 worth of stuff that I was hoping to be able to buy for \$1,500. As it turned out, I didn't spend any money and didn't get nothing. In the meantime some supposed buyer had come along and they just said, that's it.

Q: You describe the conditions under which you left, okay?

LB: Ya. Well mine was simple. I got my notice, so many days and I'd be out, that was it. That's 2 years ago, in 2005. I got the notice in August and I was gone in October, '05. That was it. My notice wasn't revoked or anything; that was it, I was gone.

Q: What was it like?

DK: Before we got set up there Lorne and I were talking about that. Technically I'm a retiree. I don't really consider myself retired, because I can't afford to stay retired. But I've been retired for the last few months. But I was saying to Lorne that I was kind of out of sorts. I'd been working steady for 36 years now, so this is a long time to be working steady without having any more than a regular vacation. The first little while that I was off, I was kind of not feeling too good about being retired. People were asking me, how's retirement? Well it's not that great. But now I'm getting a little too used to being retired.

Q: How did you feel about it?

LB: I went home and my wife wasn't working, so we just had a 7 week honeymoon. We had such a wonderful time. It was 7 weeks of absolute, some of the best times of my life. So I kind of thought maybe I should retire. I was in the process of retiring and was going to accept it as a full time job. Then I was talking to my financial guy and he said, you're set to retire, Lorne. But he said, you better go back to work, you're the kind of guy that can't sit at home for another 10 years. He says, you have to go to work. So I just filled out

resumes, and I'd like to go back to this anti-union attitude in Alberta. I did go for, I practiced interviews with companies when I was off on those 7 weeks. Everybody that I sent a resume to wanted me to come to work for them. I went into this one shop. He looked at my resume and said, you worked for a union all your life. I said, yes I have. Oh, he says, I don't hire union people, and I don't like them. Just that simple. I said, why would you clobber me before I even show you what I can do. I said, you might be making the biggest mistake of your life as far as your shop is concerned. That's what I told him. I figured, he doesn't want me anyhow, so I may as well tell him what I think. He said, and we don't smoke here either. Nope, we don't like union people. So I said, I'm very sorry you feel that way.

DK: Probably just as well you didn't go to work there, because you wouldn't have been there long anyway.

Q: That kind of attitude you don't need.

LB: No, you don't. I knew already that I would never work for that man. But that's what happened there.

[ END ]