

THERESA

When Celanese wasn't Celanese Canada  
anymore it seemed to go downhill.

Celanese was a cash cow for the States.

A lot of people from Celanese aren't working  
- they're lost-they really are

To get into an operator job was hard for

A woman. It was male oriented

No easy jobs at Celanese.

Women were turned off-go home smelling like  
Benzene- like a vinegar bottle.

BRAD.

Huge effect on Edmonton, Ft. Saskatchewan, Lamont, Mundare families.

Government puts all their eggs in one basket-oil and gas.

Day of stable jobs is over.

In the Celanese corporation you're just a number.

Big business is running the show.

Government has to look toward the future- go in

Dig a hole 100 feet deep, take it all out in two years,  
can't do that--

### Celanese

Brad & Theresa Kelly

Nov. 10, 2007

Q: Brad, you worked at Celanese how many years?

B: 27 years.

Q: And Theresa?

T: 16 years.

Q: So that plant was in important part of your lives.

T: You could say that, definitely. It was a home basically, for the both of us.

Q: What was the effect of Celanese on Edmonton?

B: It's got a huge effect on the city, the people. You talk to people in any aspect in any  
parts of the city, and they know somebody who's worked at Celanese, they know

somebody who has built part of Celanese. It's been part of Edmonton's history for 54 years.

T: A lot of summer students went through there and it affected a lot of them. A lot of them really based their education and how long they were going to go to school and everything else on knowing that they were going to be able to pay for school and going through school, working at Celanese for the summertime. It affected a lot of people.

Q: I imagine it had quite an effect on the communities that had built up around that.

B: Yes, for sure. There used to be a thousand people working there at one time. Of course it had a huge ripple effect throughout the entire city.

Q: Particularly on the northeast part of the city.

T: Northeast, Sherwood Park, those areas. We had fellows that came from Ft. Saskatchewan, Mundare, Lamont. The hub was Celanese, as part of their communities. So many families and everything else all worked at Celanese. It affected a lot of people.

Q: How did you come to work there?

B: I was working at Sherritt Gordon out at Ft. Saskatchewan, working 8 hour shifts. A friend of mine said to me, why don't you come work at Celanese; we have 12 hour shifts and it's closer to the city. That's basically how I started there. That was in 1980.

T: My sister worked at Celanese for 25 years. She's the one who helped me to get in the door. I started in the custodial department and then worked my way up through the plant site. In the custodial department, I worked afternoon shifts. Then I went to shift work and to cig tow, wrapping bales for a couple of years. Then I moved up and went to machine attendant, and did that plus another couple of other things.

Q: Cig tow, that's the cigarette filters?

T: Correct.

Q: How about you, Brad?

B: I started out as an operator in CA, which is cellulose acetate. I worked my way up and was shift supervisor for about 10 or 12 years.

Q: You started out as an operator. Was that because of previous experience?

B: Yes, previous experience, and at the time that's the openings that they had there. I never moved anywhere else, I just stayed in CA my entire time I was there. We took ? and converted into cellulose acetate fiber, which was then turned around and used in cigarette tow. That's what cigarette filters is.

Q: So the two of you were working toward the same end product.

T: Yes, started with him and ended with me.

Q: Did you work shifts through that whole period?

B: Yes, we worked shift work the entire time.

T: Twelve hours.

Q: Did you get your shifts coordinated?

T: At times.

B: Most of the times Theresa would be working nights and I'd be working days. Somebody was always home with the kids, and we had the same days off together, which was nice.

Q: So you had some control over your shifts?

T: That's one thing that was good about the management and the people at Celanese. If your family worked there or your spouse or even your kids came in as summer students, they accommodated you so you could still have a life with your family when you weren't at work. You'd always have the same days off, or opposite shifts. They really helped you in that aspect, to make sure that you could still have a family life, which was quite nice.

Q: So it was a good place to work?

T: Great place to work.

B: Yes.

Q: And now??

T: The only thing a lot of people miss about Celanese as a whole is that, like Brad had said before we started this interview, it was a family out there. You grew up with these people for 26 years. You've seen your kids every year at the Xmas party, at the summer picnics. You seen everybody's kids every year, and you all grew up as a family. That's the hardest part about not being there anymore, is that you don't have those family members that you spent so much time with; you spent half your life with those people for the time that you were there.

B: You've gone through all the trials and tribulations that come with people, their families, their relationships; all the marriages, the divorces, the kids, the kids getting into trouble. The whole nine yards. That's one of the big things that you do miss about seeing these people day to day, month to month.

Q: So it isn't just a job, it's a community.

T: It was. Still to this time there are a lot of people, like we see several people still from Celanese, and we really keep in touch with those people. When you run into people that you haven't seen for a long time, it's like you're running into an uncle that you haven't seen since the last family reunion. It's nice, and you miss them.

B: They'll always be family. You see them wherever, you bump into them in the mall or wherever it may be. It's like a long lost uncle or lost relative. You always stop and chat.

Q: Were either one of you active in the union?

T: I was. When I started there in the custodial department in 1980, I became union steward for the custodial department. Then just before everything started to hit the fan, I even told Brad this, I said, I'm making a promise to myself, I'm going to every union meeting come September when they start. I did, and then everything just snowballed, about the closing of fibers, and cutting down this and that. Just before, about 8 months before we all got laid off in May, the union had come to me and asked me if I would step up and be steward again, and kind of help people through the transitions and make sure that people knew what was out there for them, through the company, the EAP, the union resource center, classes, computer classes, anything that was offered, to make sure these people knew that these people had those options out there.

Q: Did a lot of people take advantage of that opportunity?

T: It was absolutely surprising how many people took advantage of those opportunities. There were people that I never would've even thought of that would come to a basic computer class, that took every computer class that the resource center offered – first aid, interviewing skills, resume skills, you name it. They put it together, they put it on the table, and people just ate it up like nothing. It was incredible, it was so nice that they had the resources there for them.

Q: That resource center was negotiated for them by the union.

T: Yes, and they couldn't have picked a better person to run it, and that was Dawn. She helped people with resumes; she even helped Brad with his. Dawn Forest. She was awesome – a totally incredible person, personality to go with it. I don't think they could've picked a better person to run it than her.

Q: Was she hired from the outside.

T: She actually was an employee at cig tow. She started out there as a summer student; I think it was her father that worked there. She took on a permanent job and she married an operator, had two beautiful little girls. Then she got into the union and they offered her that job. It was really nice.

Q: What was the union's role in Celanese, in health and safety, for example?

T: The union plays a huge role in making sure that people are taken care of and that they have the right resources to make sure that the quality of their work and the ability to do

their job in a safe and orderly manner is huge. Between the union and the company, and the partnership they had, I don't think they could've done a better job. They were absolutely impressive. You didn't have to worry about knowing whether or not you had to take a first aid course or a forklift course. They were always there saying, okay we have to make sure these are in play. They always made sure that that stuff was in play for you, which is quite nice.

Q: Did you notice a difference between management structures as time went on?

B: Celanese was always a very stable company, as far as management, the way management and union interacted. They brought in several American managers to run the plant more efficiently, or what they would call more efficiently. But Celanese always had a very stable, very strong management group, always interacted fairly well with the union, as far as the two of them butting heads or whatever it may be. It was always a fairly cohesive working environment. They always managed to seem to make it work fairly well between the two.

Q: Were there any blips when ownership changed?

T: I think the biggest blip was when... what was it?

B: Once it was sold to the Americans, that seemed to be the biggest, when Celanese Canada wasn't Celanese Canada anymore, it's part of the US Celanese group. I think that was probably the biggest blip....

T: Probably the biggest management kaffuffle and upset out of the whole. A lot of people didn't know where they were going. When they started closing down the petrochemical side of the plant, then everybody was like, wow what happened?

B: That was the start.

T: It just seemed to roll downhill after that.

B: I think it was a lot of politics between Canada and the US. I think that's basically what it boiled down to in the end was the politics between the two. ... We were always dictated to by the US, which is where the head office of Celanese was.

Q: Where was the head office when it was Celanese Canada?

B: It was in Montreal.

T: In Drummonville, I think.

Q: So was there some difference in the feedback you got from head office?

T: I think when it all came about, everything was more dictated to you about how things had to be done. It was more of a militant structure that was brought forth rather than just, this has to be done, everybody knows it has to be done. No, this has to be done and you

have to do it now. That was the type of attitude that came in after everything had happened.

Q: Did that result in a speedup of the rate you had to work?

T: We all broke production records in the past 7 years.

B: As far as I know, Celanese was still making money from that plant site when it shut down. All of it, the entire plant, including the petrochemical side, was still making money.

T: Every time of the year when they used to do performance sharing bonuses it came down to how many production records did they break this year? That seemed to take it over the threshold as a whole. I'm going to use the layman's term because that's what everybody used when I started there – Celanese Canada was a cash cow for the States and everybody else in order to make their money to support other ventures that they went into. They didn't take the money that they were making out of Celanese Canada to invest in Celanese Canada.

B: It was always take away from Celanese Canada.

T: Make the money, make the great product and put you over the top, but never brought anything back.

B: Never reinvested back into Canada. They shut down this plant and expanded Mexico. They took a lot of the equipment from this plant and have taken it down to Mexico.

Q: So they were making money, but they could make more money?

T: I think they could make more money down there. We had a few MLAs come through Celanese about a year and a half before we found out that we were closing they cig tow part of the plant. They tried to get gas rebates, electrical rebates, to kind of make it so it wasn't so costly to run. You wouldn't get that, there was no way to do it. On the whole, I think maybe that was one of the reasons, because between cost effectiveness and labour and everything else, and Alberta is unbelievable for labour right now. You can make it cheaper somewhere else, so why not? ... I really think that if the Alberta government would've stepped up to the plate and tried to help cut costs in giving the corporations as a whole help in gas and electricity and stuff like that, you wouldn't have these problems. Like in Drayton Valley the paper place is closing down; 140 people are losing their jobs. Why? What's happening here?

B: We're shipping all of our raw material to China, Mexico, wherever. Whatever we're using is being manufactured outside of this country.

Q: Do you see it corresponding with the Alliance Pipe Line being built?

B: You look at the manufacturing in this province and anything that's manufactured is slowly being phased out. It's going to China, it's going to Mexico.

T: It's not just raw materials, it's everything else. Roots Canada, where's Roots Canada now? They're not in Canada. They don't make any of their products here anymore in Canada. Everything's made on the other side of the world and brought back here. What's going on here?

B: It appears that the government has put all their eggs in one basket, and it's all natural resources. It's all about oil and gas. If it's not oil and gas, then it's being pushed aside.

Q: How many people from Celanese got jobs comparable to what they had?

B: I would say maybe a third.

T: I'd say maybe 50% that actually stayed in the petrochemical industry and got what they were making or more. The rest? Well the rest are a serious change of lifestyle, change of habits, change of everything.

Q: Celanese was a good place to work.

B: Yes, it was a great place to work. We made great money there.

T: A lot of people, and I'm going to say this with a grain of salt, a lot of people when they left Celanese, they knew they had to make a life change. Not only job wise and lifestyle wise, but they had to make change. I think a lot of people, when they don't want to talk about what they're doing, is because they don't want people to know. They want to get on with their new lives. Yes, they're still going to give you a hug when they see you and say hello, they're not going to ignore you. Nobody that I've ever seen has ever ignored you, that you passed by from Celanese. But they just want to move on, it's time for them to move on. That's how a lot of people see it.

B: Their life at Celanese is over and done with.

Q: We also know of some people who aren't working.

T: Oh there's a lot of people not working. A lot of the, you kind of feel bad for them, but I don't think they've found...they're lost, they really are.

Q: It must be a shock to a lot of people.

B: And nobody was young there. Everybody was 40-ish and above. It's hard. I left Celanese with never having been on a job interview before. Never been on a job interview, because when you were hired at Celanese in that '70s and '80s era, if you could walk and talk you had a job. There were so many jobs, like today. There's so many jobs out there that you could go from job to job, week to week. There was no job interviews during that time. People were scared when they lost Celanese.

Q: There aren't many 25 year jobs around these days.

T: No, and you take a risk wherever you go now. I don't think that our kids, who are in their late teens and 20s, are going to be able to say, mom, dad, I found this great job, I'm going to be there until I'm 55 years old. That's not going to happen.

B: It doesn't happen anymore, unless maybe if you're lucky enough to get into the oil industry in a plant, even there that's still... the price of oil comes down, ...

Q: Do you mind if I ask what you're doing now?

B: I took a complete switch. I didn't want to work in a plant anymore, I didn't want to work shift work anymore. I wanted to work outside and by myself. Our next door neighbor asked me when I was at Celanese, why don't you come work for AMA as a emergency response tow truck driver. I love it. It's a great place, it's a great organization. They treat their employees really well, and I really enjoy what I'm doing now.

T: Me, I work two jobs. I have become the two-job person in the house. I enjoy doing it. When I left Celanese I took a bartending course and I got a job as a bartender. During the daytime I'm an administrative assistant for Inner State Batteries. It's a really good job; I like both of them.

Q: You two have come out okay.

T: I think when we look at everybody else over the whole, I think we're doing pretty good, I really do.

B: We certainly don't make the money that we used to. But we've made changes, we do what we do, and carry on.

Q: Alberta needs stable jobs like Celanese.

B: The day of the stable job is over.

T: I think it's had its hurrah already.

B: I don't think you'll find a job now that you can count on for 30 years.

Q: Does that detract from the stability of the whole community?

T: It does, it really does. Our kids coming up are in the job market now. We have one who sells real estate, one who has his own contracting company, and two that are doing labour jobs also. I don't think those kids are going to be able to find that job that they can have for 30 years.

B: Celanese was a fantastic company. We've all walked away with pensions. A lot of places don't have pension plans. Celanese had one of the best pension plans going. There isn't that anymore. None of the companies out there have a pension plan, where the company contributes to your pension. We've both got really nice pensions from being in jobs that long.



Q: How many people do you know who are going to have a pension?

T: Not very many.

B: Probably about 25% of the people that we know. Other than the employees from Celanese, very few people have a really good pension.

Q: What does that say about our government's policies?

B: They really don't care.

T: I don't think they do. Most of us have been fortunate enough, and even our parents are fortunate enough that they had good jobs and retired with pensions out of good companies. But when it comes around, I don't think that the government as a whole, pensions and benefits go hand in hand with great jobs. To get a job now days that's going to have a pension and benefits, it's very difficult when the average job in Alberta, the province where the streets are supposed to be lined with gold, minimum wage is not more than \$8 an hour. How do you grow on something that won't grow along with everything else?

Q: Do you think the pension and benefits would exist without the union?

T: No, I don't think so.

Q: That's another thing – when there's no stable workforce, it's harder to have the union.

T: Absolutely true.

Q: Were there any gender equity issues at Celanese?

T: There was a time in cig tow, to get into an operator's position was really hard for a woman. I don't know if it was the mechanical test or what it was, I have no idea. But then everything just moved along, and there were women in jobs that, they were never there. They were pregnant women, and they were doing the same job as men were doing. For me, it was kind of neat because I went from the custodial department into cig tow. I was one of the few women that actually stayed downstairs wrapping bales with the boys for 12 hours every day. It was incredible, because the other women that had done it only were down there for like 6 or 8 months, maybe a year tops. It was kind of cool. I don't think besides the operator part of Celanese that it was hard for women to do anything there. A woman could walk in there and do whatever she wanted. But at the operator level it was a little difficult. Summer students came in and the girls did jobs, but there weren't very many women operators that passed a certain threshold.

B: It wasn't the type of environment that... women are starting to get into... the base education level standard used to be grade 12. Now they've stepped it up to a 4<sup>th</sup> class power engineering steam engineering ticket. Very few women, if you look at NAIT or

any secondary institution, very few women are interested or are going to school to do this. It's very male orientated, and always has been, working in a chemical plant.

Q: Do you thing at some point there was a breakthrough in terms of women being able to do more in the plant?

T: I think there was. When I started in cig tow and I was wrapping bales, all the guys used to say to me, you should be upstairs with the girls. Why should I be upstairs with the girls? I'm downstairs with the guys, I like hanging out with the guys. I don't want to work upstairs. I used to tell the guys all the time, I'm not old enough to work upstairs with those ladies. They'd say, no you're not old enough, but it's just an easier job for you and it' would be nice for you. I'm like, but you know what, I don't want to go up there, I'm not ready to go up there yet.

Q: What was the easiest job?

T: I'm going to say no job was easy at Celanese; I'm going to be totally honest with you. Everybody worked, and they worked hard. Every job was tough. But physically demanding, I'd say bale press was a physical job. It was all guys, all big burly guys doing this job. And me. And I had fun; it was a great experience.

Q: What did an operator do?

B: An operator was more of a process watchdog basically. They monitored the equipment, the monitored the process. They took the readings, did their samples. It was a lot less physical work than where Theresa had worked in cig tow. In CA it was more monitoring the process, basically a batch process.

Q: What aspect of that would result in fewer women being involved?

B: I don't understand why...

T: I just don't think women took the incentive to just say, you know what, I'm going to do this.

B: The door was always open, always open.

Q: Were there women operators?

T: Yes, but not till the end.

B: Not till the very end. Cheryl started in 19??...

T: She was there for 7 years. Cheryl was an operator for 7 years.

B: They had absolutely no qualms about training a woman operator or having a girl there. The door was always open. It was just never...

T: It was a dirty place to work too – stinky, dirty, it was bad. I used to clean there and I hated going in there. Maybe that's what turned a lot of women off, was going home smelling like benzene or smelling like a bottle of vinegar. So maybe that's why; I don't know why.

Q: Were either of you active in the community?

B: no.

Q: Because of your shift work?

T: Basically, yes. You didn't have time. You had no time whatsoever.

Q: We've notice that people involved in unions tend to be active in the community as well.

T: I think maybe if we had a bit more time. The kids are, we only have one child left at home.

B: You just never know.

Q: You have 4 children?

T: We have 5 between the two of us.

Q: Did you go through pregnancies during your time at Celanese?

T: I was never pregnant at Celanese. My sister was, but you know what? A lot of the girls that I worked with were pregnant, out there doing operator's jobs or whatever. You had no problems there whatsoever when you were pregnant. No problems whatsoever.

Q: Were there a lot of couples?

T: There was actually quite a few couples. It was quite surprising how many married couples were on that plant site, or were dating couples, or whatever. Like we said before, you went through marriages, kids, grandkids, divorces. You fought like you were siblings when you were there. There was a lot of married couples there.

Q: And people worked it out in terms of shifts?

T: Yes, they were really good about it. If you wanted to move a shift because it didn't work with your husband's shift. Brad worked across the street and I came into cig tow and said, you know what, I can't work this shift; I really need to go on this shift because it works with his shift. No problem. It was great, it was nice. It was really good.

B: We have no hard feelings towards Celanese or the company or anything else. We had a great run there. We had fantastic jobs for 27 years. We had a great job, wonderful pay,

great benefits, and really great people to work with. The end is the end, and you carry on, you move on.

T: You try your best.

Q: Do you think the closing was necessary.

B: It probably wasn't necessary, but who are... we just worked there.

T: We're just a number.

B: In the Celanese corporation you're just a number, and I don't know if they care or thought about it. It's big business.

T: It's big business; I don't think anybody cares, really.

Q: What would you do differently to ensure jobs for the next generation?

T: You'd have to totally restructure the whole workplace, everything out there.

B: Nothing is structured for that anymore. There's no businesses that are looking 25 years down the road, 50 years down the road.

Q: What do you think is a key to it?

B: Big business in this country and all over the world is running the show. The government doesn't run the show, it's big business that runs the show. I think every body knows that, and everybody's going along for the ride with big business. Take what you can now and see what happens tomorrow.

T: I think the biggest thing that the government has to realize is they have to look towards the future. They have to look toward what's going to be left here in the next 40 years. Everybody says the oil sands, you're going to have work out there for the next 40 or 50 years. How can you make sure that you put a cap on what's going on out there, making sure that we can make this last 50 or 60 years. Then you have something for these generations to come up and say, you know what, I'm going to be able to find that 30 year job. Because there's some structure out there and somebody's actually said, you know what, there's a caveat on this and we can't go past this line. We have to do something to make sure that people can't just go in there and go, no, I'm digging that trench hole 100 feet deep and I'm taking everything out of there in two years. You can't do that.

Q: Why doesn't Canada have a national energy plan?

T: I don't think it was ever thought of. I think they knew what they had, but they were too greedy on getting it out that they didn't worry about anything else.

B: You'd think they'd have a cap, but our government is run by big business, and that's the bottom line.

T: It's quite sad.

[ END ]