<u>Celanese</u>

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Keywords

Celanese process operator acids occupational health and safety union schools social aspects cigarette tow China Beverly Crest

Q: Where were you when the plant shut down?

AN: Basically I was at home. I heard through the grapevine that it was only a matter of time before the plant was going to be going down completely. We could see already what was happening at the plant site. The units were being shut down slowly, slowly, and we were down to the last four units. My time had come up for retirement already, I had my magic numbers. So I waited for a little while because I figured there was going to be a little package. Lucky I waited. When it finally came, it was kind of disappointing. Well it was not so much disappointing as, so many years so many of us worked there, and all of a sudden it was finished. It was heartbreaking more than anything.

Q: Which four units were left?

AN: Fibers was running, methanol was running, CA was running, and PE was running.

Q: What did each one do?

AN: Methanol made methanol, which you use for gas line antifreeze. Fibers, they were making cigarette tow, the stuff that they use in cigarette filters. CA department worked; we made the raw material for the cigarette filter, which was called cellulose acetate. It looked more like popcorn, expensive popcorn. And PE, I don't really know what PE stands for. There were so many short terms in PE, and I don't really know what it stood for. I could probably pronounce it for you but it probably wouldn't make much difference.

Q: How many units were there when the plant was at its height?

AN: When the plant was at its height we had more than 1200 people working there. The petrochem, everything was divided into, across the road was petrochem and this side was

CA and fibers. On the petrochem there were many units, small units running – oxidation, PO, LPO, PE, SO, all short terms for what they are.

Q: How did you come to work at Celanese?

AN: I started back in the late '60s. Alberta provincial government was offering packages for anyone who wanted to get upgraded in education. I had dropped out of school in grade 9 and then went to work when I was a young kid. As time progressed and this was offered to me, then I decided I'm going to go back to school. So I went to Alberta Vocation for 18 months, and I got my high school degree. We were just on summer leave and I was going to go to university in the fall, didn't know what I was going to take yet. There was a job offering at Celanese. A friend of mine, Jim Hall, was working at Celanese. He said, you know, we worked the fiberglass together, he says, you know, you should come to Celanese, they're always hiring people. I said, okay I'll look into it. He says, ya it's pretty good work. At the time, I had three job offers: The City of Edmonton offered digging deep sewer; Fiberglass Canada said, you can come back, because we need people; and then Celanese called me and said, come in for an interview on Monday. I thought three jobs and all have to be on Monday. I have to see everyone. I thought which one am I going to go to? I thought, you know what, I'm going to go to Celanese. I went there and they said, can you start right now? We have a job for two weeks for you. I said, okay. I said, I haven't got any change of clothes. They said, no problem, you can work with the clothes you have. I thought, okay. So we didn't need steel-toed shoes or nothing, just street clothes was good enough. They said for two weeks. Well that two weeks went by, not even two weeks, and they said, can you stay on for another two weeks? I said, okay, university isn't going to start yet. So then he came and said, we got a big contract, could you stay on until this contract is finished? I said, for how long? Two months. I thought, well I'll take a year off, work, and then go to university. Well that came by and next thing you know, another order and another order. Things were really booming then. I started in '69, in August of '69. That fall everything was picking up. There were lots of jobs at that point. So then three months passed and they said, you know, you're past your probationary period now; if you want to stay with us, you can write the test now and become an operator. So I said, okay. So I wrote my test and they said, oh no problem. So that's how I came to be in Celanese. Then I started in the CA department; then I went as an operator. At that point when I went into operations when I was permanent, then I got involved with the union as a shop steward.

Q: What does an operator do?

AN: An operator is a process operator. In the department I worked was a batch system. Everything was repetitious; it was on a batch system. If you worked in one area, it was the same thing happened every 12 minutes; every 12 minutes you did the same thing. It's hard to explain until you see it. I'm going to go with working in the control room, isolate it to that area. Before the automation came in like how everything now with the computer age, everything's altogether different. But then everything was on paper. The guy started the paper and that was passed on to you, and then at exactly a certain time you had to get up and push a button on the panel. Then you sit down and mark down the time and you made sure the lights flashed, the ones that you wanted, you check it off. You waited and then exactly five minutes later you had to go and open those valves, two valves, go back,

push another button, sit down. You wait five minutes, you get up, close those valves, push another button, burn a selector, push another button. It wasn't hard work, but it was repetitious. You got used to it, put your feet up on a chair and you knew exactly five minutes that you had to do it. If you got late, then the whole thing would be set back. If you were 10 minutes late on something, big problems. Now the whole system's all mixed up and things are behind and things aren't working very good. So it's very important that you did everything exactly on time.

Q: Were there ever any problems?

AN: Many problems. We worked with acids, which was very corrosive. If you got acid on your eye, and sulfuric acid was one of the worst, because just the finest spray of sulfuric acid would burn instantly, there was no time to run for water or anything, it would burn instantly. The concentration was 99.6% pure. We were always very careful wherever the sulfuric, because if it got on your skin it would burn you, no questions asked. There was a lot of it in the process all the time, and if you were near it you had to be completely protected with rubber gear, face shield, everything. Even then you didn't like messing with sulfuric, because sulfuric and water don't mix. You couldn't pour this down the drain or nothing. That was one of the worst chemicals to work with, because it was so corrosive. And yes, there was many screw ups, plain and simple.... Everything was on a sequence on a batch system. You go to this one, you had to open the door, check inside to make sure you had the one machine and not the one next to it or the one before it, you had to be at that one. Then you open the door, you check to make sure that the valves were closed. When you hit that button, cuz it would drop 2 tons of acid in three minutes. Those values are 13 inch values: they drop instantly, they're gone. So if you went to the wrong one and you opened the valves, valves are manual, you just push the button and it opened. All of a sudden, oh wrong one. Now you got a big problem, because now it's in there, the temperatures are wrong, this isn't ready, that isn't ready. Now you have to get rid of all this acid. You cannot put the other stuff into it; you have to get rid of it. You have to drop it down so everything now is postponed for another hour and a half, because that's how long it's going to take to cycle everything. Then your boss wants to have a word with you. Like I say, there was many things. Sometimes people get so caught up in routine that you just ya, ya, and you go and look inside, you tell the guy, oh the vale is open. Oh, sorry, he goes. Now you don't go back and check. Instead of closing the valve that was open, he opened the other one. So no you go, you hit the button, this stuff's all supposed to go inside. You wonder, what's happening here? The guy downstairs comes running up: hey, you overflowed, you double decked for me. Everything went from upstairs right downstairs to the guy down below. Now everything's overflowing onto the floor. Acid. You can't breathe. This stuff is so strong you're gagging. You have to run for a respirator, you have to leave everything while you put on a respirator. But it's so strong it's burning your face, your skin is burning. So you open all the windows. Not bad in the summertime, wintertime different story. Then you open up all the windows to air it out; you start freezing up the lines. Some of the acids freeze at very high temperatures, 12 or 15 degrees C. Glacial acid will freeze at 15 degrees. Now the lines are freezing up on you, so everything starts compounding itself all the way down. Now this stuff that's now overflowing on the floor, it's all got to be cleaned up. It's poured over a large area, so it all has to be shoveled up. You put water on to try and keep

the smell down, and scoop everything up into dumpster bins. You don't want to do that; it stinks big time.

Q: What about the occupational health and safety?

AN: When I started in '69 there was rules, there was safety standards. But the safety standards weren't enforced at all. You had to wear safety glasses all the time. Oh those stupid glasses never fit worth a darn. On the off shifts nobody wore safety glasses. I got acid in my eye, I can't remember what year that was, I would think probably 1971, '72. I wasn't wearing my eye protection, and I opened the valve and there was a blockage in there. I was rodding it to try and get, and all of a sudden this acid come straight into my face. I ran to the safety shower but it was too late, I had already burnt my eyes bad. I went downstairs and said, I gotta go to first aid, I burnt myself. That little burn was not something you get from hot water, this is acid we're talking about. I was off work for three weeks, and for the first four days I couldn't see nothing. I was scared, I thought for sure, cuz I was bandaged up. From that time I got that acid in my eye, eye protection was enforced, it was implemented. You get caught without it, you got reprimanded. At first every one went, ya ya ya, just because one guy gets hurt now you have to... So they said, ya but that one person just about lost his eyes because of this, so now everybody has to wear safety glasses all the time. If you got caught without them, where's your safety glasses? Even the supervisors were reprimanded if someone on his shift was not wearing safety glasses and somebody seen, everyone said, put on our glasses, put on your glasses. It was mandatory, you had to. It was just like you couldn't go out in 30 below weather without a parka, you had to.

Q: Did the union get involved much with health and safety?

AN: I sat on the health and safety committee at Celanese. We implemented different projects. If we had a safety concern, it was brought up to myself and then we had meetings with the union and company. The company was always, at that point, very in favour of anything we brought forward. If it was going to cost them money, they didn't care. If it was a safety issue and there was a problem, they would try very hard to correct it. Sometimes it took a while, because like anything else you gotta do studies and look at the overall picture, not one incident. You gotta look at overall of everything. Slowly the snow started getting stuck together and as you rolled the ball it got bigger and bigger. That's what happened, to the point where at the end, before I left, the safety standards were very high at Celanese.

Q: What were your involvements with the union?

AN: One of the stewards asked if I'd be interested in taking over the shop steward position, and they'd send me to school. I said, I really don't know anything about it. He said, you'll go to school and be taught. I got involved slowly. Then into other committees from that. I started going further and further to different places, on different committees. Being a union steward, then I got to be area steward in my department. It was a lot better, because I got along with my people very well, the people I worked with, and had a very good relationship with the company. All the supervisors, I had worked for them for so long, and a lot of them were junior to me, so I respected them and they respected me for

my position. I had really good relationship with the union and with the company. Sure there was problems, like anything else, that had to be resolved. But overall it worked out really well.

Q: Were the men supportive of the union?

AN: Basically when I got involved with it I didn't know, and I thought, I heard union is bad, it's communist, it's right wing. It wasn't until I started getting into it and more and more involved with it that I realized that, you know this isn't so bad; we're representatives for a group of people. That's what I had to start telling the people – I'm not the union, you guys are. You tell me, and I'm your spokesperson, and that's what I am. That's my position here, I'm your spokesperson. When you have a problem, you come see me. I take it to management or I take it to the executive, we discuss it there. If you can't make it, because we work shift work, I was always booked off for all meetings. Where anything was brought forward, it was addressed and the person got a reply back. They said, the union wants this money. I said, no just hold it, it's all of us. When we ask for wages or what we want for this, everyone was asked, what do you want? Everything was given in one big pile. Now from this, now this is what we are going to negotiate for, this is what you want. If it got so far and they said, no we can't give you this, we can't give you this, we can't give you this, but we will give you this, this, this. Now we as the union, what we call executive, now took this back to our people and said, this is what the company is offering. Do you want it or don't you want it? Let us know, because we're going to go back. A lot of people didn't know what they wanted. So what does the union feel? Should we accept it? Should we take it? They said, well we can negotiate it, we'll try and see what we can do with it. That's how it worked. But to try and tell people, and it's hard in any union, you have to educate your members first before you can go anywhere. If your members aren't educated and they don't know, they think the union are the ones, and that's not the way it is. Sometimes it is, sometimes unions have too much pull. Maybe, but you have to look at how many people are involved in this union. The bigger the union the stronger the executive is, they have more to work with. If you have six people in a little union in a little plant, and the company says no, you have no pull, you have nothing. You try, you have your labour standards that you have to go by, and you use your labour standards or whatever and try and be nice. I always say, be nice and show them respect, they'll show you respect. They show you disrespect, you do the same thing in return.

Q: Were there times when the membership weren't supportive of the executive?

AN: Yes there was. When we went on strike in 1973, I was one of the picket captains then. Everyone had voted; we had all voted that we were going to go on strike. Our strike vote was unanimous just about. Now all of a sudden we were told, going on strike is no picnic, you'd better make sure, you got your last cheque and now there won't be nothing. You won't get any strike pay for three weeks. We don't care, they owe us this, we want this. I said, you'd better make sure that's what you want, because once you walk out that door, it gets hard, it gets ugly. After the first week it wasn't bad, then you could see what was happening. People were saying, oh maybe this isn't so good. But once you step over the line, you gotta carry the load. Well the union has to get us back into work. I said, well no, we all as a group have to go, not just the union, all of us have to go back. Slowly we kept negotiating, negotiating. We had to keep morale as high as possible, because we could see already as picket captains what was happening. People were starting to want to go back to work. We said, we will go back to work, but we have to fight for this. We're not going to get it if we cave in now. The company will say, thank you for coming back. So we waited it out. People could see we were making progress in the negotiations, things were coming better and better. Finally we have a meeting now; this is what the company has offered. Are you willing to take this? A lot of people said, that sounds fair. A lot of people said, no no no. So now you have the people within themselves fighting, and that has got to stop. You have to say, well look, we're coming in as a group. We're trying to get things thing settled, let's go from here. We'll try and get this; if we can get this, will you be happy with this? What do you want that you'll be happy with? So they went back to the table, back to us. Finally voted in favour of going back to work. Now everybody was happy. But it was no picnic, it was no picnic. When anyone thinks if you go out on strike it's going to be a picnic, it's not. It's hard on the company, it's hard on the people, it's hard on the families. It's hard on everybody. Nobody gains, but at the same time you have to fight for your rights. If you don't, they'll just walk all over you. That's what unions are there for.

- Q: But you had a good relationship there with management?
- AN: All the time, all the way through.
- Q: What about individual grievances?

AN: I always felt if you go in, if a guy came to me with a gripe or a complaint, in our training it says to write up a grievance right away and submit the paperwork. I would go to the immediate supervisor: we have a problem with this fellow, he says this and this. Can you explain to me why you're doing this and this to him? We can resolve it right here and we don't have to get everybody involved. If we can't get it resolved here then we have to go the other route, because that's my job as a union steward to continue with this thing and resolve this thing. And 75 to 80% of the time you would resolve it right there. Someone said something and someone got mad, and all of a sudden there was no more negotiation. With me being the middleman and being fair with both, walking in and trying to sort this out, usually at the first level. At that level you can sort most things out. The longer it goes, the more involved it gets with all of a sudden what started out as some minute thing that could've been fixed is now blown out of proportion, too many people involved; much other issues are now involved. Whoa, we have to go back to the original problem. Sometimes it takes, as you know, being involved in the union yourself, you know how long it takes to go to arbitration, and the cost involved. The cost involved is not only company, it's also union. It's a lot of money to resolve a little issue that could've been corrected early before it got that far. But at the same time, if it was an issue that had to be pushed, say it was a safety issue where the company doesn't really want to bend that way because they know it's going to cost them a lot of money. This is the sort of thing you sometimes have to keep pushing, you have to keep pushing. If you don't, it's going to get washed under the table and forgotten. There's certain issues that have to be pushed to arbitration, it doesn't matter what the cost is.

Q: Did the union have any environmental program?

AN: There was a lot of times we'd think, how can they get away with this? It was addressed. Look at what's happening here, there's benzene here. We know that's a carcinogenic. What are you doing as a company to prevent this? All of a sudden, okay, now everyone has to wear a respirator. No no no, this is not the fix all. The problem is you have to get rid of the benzene or you make sure it doesn't get out into the atmosphere. Then with the government stepping in with emissions, what used to go up the stack, when I started there everything went up the stack. If something was wrong, you just vent it into the atmosphere, nobody said nothing. Now if you open that, computer picks it up right away, how long, how much. You better have paperwork signed as to why you did it, who did it, for what reason, and how you're going to stop it.

Q: In the early days, what sort of emissions were they putting out?

AN: Benzene, solvents, a lot of CS2, a lot of stuff was vented into the atmosphere. They're long gone now, but there was lots. When we cleaned our vessels, in a process like this there's a lot of dirt, a lot of contamination, waste. What are we going to do with all this waste? There was no provisions for Swan Hills for ?, so we just take and pump it down the deep wells. What didn't get pumped down the deep wells, which they had five wells on the Celanese plant site which go down a long ways. But the heavier solids, what do we do with this? So they had a big dugout just by the riverbank, close to the riverbank. The truck every morning would take tons and tons of this stuff and dump it in this dugout. This stuff was contaminated with lots of benzene, a lot of acid, a lot of solvents contaminants you couldn't get away with now. Years and years and years of it was dumped there on the riverbank. All of a sudden this stuff is starting to leach into the river, because it was right on the bank and this stuff is making its way into the river downstream. Twin Bridges Sand and Gravel had their gravel pit just north of the plant site. They're digging gravel and, what the heck is this black stuff coming out of the ground? It sure as heck isn't oil, that's for sure. They checked it and it's stuff coming from Celanese, from their big dugout, that's where it's leaching. So now what? So Celanese turns around and buys out Twin Bridges Sand and Gravel, the whole area, because it's all contaminated. That stuff all leached in there, all the stuff that was still there was just now covered up. That's where it is now, still underneath. They drilled a bunch of pilot holes around to try and leach, and they were sampling it to see exactly how much contaminants there is. That's now in the last 15 years, they drilled holes and are trying to get the stuff to drain into these holes so they can bring it up and go through ET, which is effluent treatment. Everything went to ET, except if they picked up benzene. So then we had to change our process, because now everything going to effluent treatment had to be able to be treated. If it can't be treated, like benzene you can't treat it, you can't neutralize it, it's there. If the monitor was picking it up, whoa, why is this benzene in here? You know you have to clean your waste before you send it to us. So then we had to change our process again. Now we have to do it like this, then we had to sample everything before we sent it out, in little containers, and check it before we pumped it. If it was good, you pumped it; if it was no good, keep cleaning it. From what it was to what it is, is altogether different.

Q: Did you involved in union schools?

AN: I went to several schools. I went to Banff school and they had a seminar there with the Alberta Federation of Labour. I was in Jasper for a week in the union school. And all

the little ones here in town, local, being shop steward, advancing in the union. Like anybody else, you gotta go to school to learn. If you don't go to school, you don't know anything about it.

Q: Did the members ever question why we were even wasting our time with groups like the AFL and Edmonton Labor Council and all that stuff?

AN: Ed Ewasiuk was involved in the labour movement. Ed Ewasiuk was very knowledgeable about it. Reg Basken also. They knew everything, so when they were spokespeople at seminars, they were very good spokespeople. And they brought good spokespersons in for us. If we felt that we went to school and didn't get anything out of it, they would say, well what did you want to get out of this that you didn't? So we'd bring it in and they'd say, okay then we have someone else who will take that position. It just got better and better. I enjoyed it. When the nurses were on strike we did a little fundraiser to help out the nurses when we were in Jasper.

Q: What did you tell your members about why you should be getting involved with stuff outside your own local?

AN: For education purpose, so that you know where the union is going. Just basically to educate people. A lot of people say, well what's this AFL, what is this thing? I said, it's a group of people that, it's just subsidiaries of the union movement. I says, they are there for a reason. The laws are being made. A lot of these laws are being implemented and they have to be made and they have to be read through. I sat in, in Red Deer when occupational health and safety was just starting. I went as a union member to this thing where all the ground roots were being set for the original occupational health and safety.

Q: In about 1976?

AN: Right. In the seminar that I sat in, there was two doctors and there was one lawyer and there was myself. I thought, I'm just a union steward here and I'm listening to these people talking. That's a seminar that we were at for the ground roots of the occupational health and safety. I thought, I'm just a shop steward here, and I'm sitting here trying to make law on this. I thought to myself, is this really going to go anywhere? As we sat as a group, that's when I realized that little bit of input that we all had as union members (and we were mixing in with the doctors and everything), that's where everything started. But I didn't realize it at that point. I thought, oh this is just seminar we're going to go to and I wonder if anything's ever going to happen with it. But that is the one that actually was the ground roots for it all.

Q: Without the union, the workers wouldn't have had a voice at the table.

AN: No, not at all.

Q: What about the social aspects of working at the plant?

AN: Socially there was a very strong bond – strong bond between shifts, there were four rotating shifts – a very strong bond between shifts. And then as a unit, because we

worked in different units, so that unit was a bond. And then Xmas time, children's picnics, everybody got together. That was one of the things when I left, that part of it was cut off, all of a sudden it was cut off. You walk in, you knew everybody. You knew a lot of their personal life, what this one did, what that one does for hobbies. Everyone's going, well I'm having a party at my place, or we'd go out to his cabin. It was a very strong social bond. Then the wives also got to know each other, and there was another bond there. Then the kids got to know the kids. As the kids grew up, naturally where do they want to go? They want to work at Celanese. A majority of the kids start ending up back at Celanese again. As their fathers were getting up, the kids were starting up at the bottom, because they seen what their dad liked working there, so they wanted to work there. So it was really strong. I can honestly say I miss that. When I left, that part of it all of a sudden was just cut off. I thought, hmmm. For about two days it really bothered me. Then I thought, this is what I wanted, to retire; I'm going to live now, just carry on. People keep in touch with me still. It doesn't matter where you go, whether you go to Walmart, Canadian Tire, just about every day you run into somebody that you worked with at Celanese or they know somebody who worked at Celanese. There was so many people there, such a turnover. At the same time, when you worked there it was more like a status symbol. It was a good paying job, it was nice, we were shift work. You could say, I know a year in advance what day I'm going to be working on that day. I have my calendar, and I stick by this. It was good that way.

Q: What impact did the closing of Celanese have on Edmonton?

AN: It's a shame that it had to go. It's just heartbreaking that it's gone. It started there in 1952 when they started the building. Thinking that that's going to run forever, which you think is going to run forever, because it just got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and they employed so many people. Then they started downsizing and downsizing and downsizing. Now, to see that plant gone, and just drive by and look at it, and see no steam coming off. Near the end there was no pollution anymore, a lot of steam coming off. Now is when it should be running.

Q: Why did it have to shut down?

AN: The company made a lot of money. They made a lot of money while they were here. Times got a little bit tight with the energy thing, with the price of gas going up and with the environmental issues. It was getting more and more costly, but at the same time they got around all those barriers. The profit margin wasn't there, but it was still a big enough profit margin. We could see that things were still doing okay. They were cutting corners, and they cut enough corners that they were still streamlining and doing okay, because their orders were coming in. Methanol was making money, CA was making money, fibers was making money. The units that were still running were making good money. When they started shutting down plants down east I thought, well it won't be long before we'll be coming here. That's when it all started. You see a Celanese plant shutting down in the States and also down east, and now it's starting to affect us here. When I finally heard that it's going to be gone completely, I thought, I can't believe this is happening. It just shouldn't be; it should be running and employing a lot of people. That's just not the way it works. Q: Can you relate it to what's happening globally?

AN: A lot of the stuff, the machinery and equipment from the fibers, everything got shipped to China. So that's telling you also, this equipment ran very well here, and the reason why it went to China is because it's cheaper to produce cigarette tow in China than it is here. The labour is minute price-wise, so there's a bigger profit margin in China. I think probably in years to come, China is going to be the power. Everything is headed in that direction. Whether we want to accept it or not, it's true. It's building up, building up, building up, and it's going to end up probably being a superpower eventually. In years to come, it will be.

Q: Now we're not adding value to our natural feedstocks.

AN: There's other things that are coming into play. They've got these hybrid cars now, that's coming, it's coming. If you're sitting on an oil reservoir and they say, well there's no oil, the reserves here are depleting, whether they're depleting or not I don't know, that I can't say. But when they're juggling the prices up and down 10 cents a day on your fuel, that's telling me that somebody's manipulating the market, plain and simple. It's not reserves, it's somebody is manipulating the market. Because the oil companies can, they will. It's not only that; government has some part to do with it also.

Q: Did the government try to prevent the shutdown?

AN: I don't think they really did. I don't know the background information. I can only speculate whether they had or not. I would say no, I don't think they did.

Q: When did you sense the beginning of the end?

AN: When I started, the parking lot was full. That parking lot has a capacity for 1000 vehicles. It wasn't big enough, it wasn't big enough. We had a bus service coming in from downtown in the morning, two buses in the morning and two in the evening. That's how many people there was working there. If you didn't come in there a bit early, you didn't have a parking spot, you had to park in the contractors' parking lot. As time progressed, you could see there was hardly any people on the bus, there was room in the parking lot. They were shutting down some of the units, but we never really knew why. We just thought, our unit is working. We just couldn't make enough product to sell. As hard as we tried, we just couldn't make our quota.

Q: The quotas were too high?

AN: Well no, there was just such a large demand for cigarette tow or for cellulose acetate, which was your raw material for all your polyesters. Polyesters were coming in. Some of the other units were producing some stuff like acrolites; I don't even know what they used it for. But that stuff stunk; it stunk to high hell, let me tell you. It stunk so bad. You know what weasel smells like? Multiply that by 10, that's what acrolites smell like. People would go from work to the Beverly Crest for a beer, nobody could stand these people. They smelt so bad, like a bunch of weasels. Terrible stuff. Some of these units were shutting down for whatever reason, I think because there was no demand for that

particular thing. Arnel was another one. Arnel was a big popular thing. When nylon come out, arnel come out. Nice clothes come out of arnel. And then polyester started coming, which didn't require arnel anymore; it was cellulose acetate that was being used for that process. So arnel was gone. So suddenly our product, which used to be sent to England and China, was now being diverted into our own plant right here on the plant site, into fibers, which was used to make a lot of your polyesters. Then all of a sudden, oh, cigarette tow. Polyester started dropping off, because carpets got better and better and different products got better than what we were making. So then we went into cigarette tow, which was the same material. Next thing you know, we had the market for cigarette tow here. We were producing 80% of the cigarette tow in Canada right at the plant site here in Edmonton. Then with tobacco, with people starting to cut back on their smoking, needless to say all, all of a sudden the market wasn't there. It was a slowdown period for us, really slowdown period for us, to the point where we were just barely running. Then China started picking up cigarette filters, then all the shipments started going to China. Then all of a sudden as much as we could make again, go, go, go, go, And the other units were slowly shutting down, shutting down. This was not required anymore, it's an old process, the boilers were getting old. It wasn't making that much money, so they shut them down. Slowly, slowly, the petrochem side was starting to shut down completely. That's when you say, I wonder if it's ever going to affect us here. You'd say, no it won't affect us, because we're sending everything to China. Well whoever thought that maybe the Chinese want all our equipment over there, and they can make it themselves there. Why even bother here? Slowly, slowly you could see what was happening. That's when I thought, oh-oh, this may not last forever. It went fibers, when they said they were going to shut down fibers, I knew then at that point, it won't be long before this is going to be shut down too.

Q: Was there a shift in management toward more productivity?

AN: Yes, because there was a big profit margin then, a big profit margin. We could work as much overtime as we wanted to, it didn't matter. If you had a little bit of cleanup, well I'll just work overtime. There was no problem there. But like I say, when you had to start cutting corners, it's just like a budget in a house. You have to start cutting corners, you can't just say, well I'll leave the doors open and run the furnace day and night. That's exactly what happens, you have to shut the doors.

Q: Did you notice that kind of change happening?

AN: Exactly. They were saying, the energy costs is going up up, look at the charts, look at what it's costing for fuel. We were using a lot of fuel in methanol and in our furnace in acid recovery unit. The amount of gas we used in one day would heat a house like this for a year, and we used that probably in one hour. We used a lot of gas. So when the price of natural gas started going up, all of a sudden it was starting to be a cost factor. Now we have to start conserving somewhere, so where? We still need that amount of gas to heat to these temperatures to get it to 1100 degrees C.; we have to have that temperature. We can't just say, well we're going to burn rubber tires, cuz it doesn't work. So they said we have to start insulating all our vessels. All our vessels, all our piping has to be insulated properly. All the vessels were just open metal. They were hot; you walked by them... All of a sudden blankets cover everything, fiberglass blankets that were made to cover every

vessel. The tops were covered. All of a sudden, here we are again, using a heck of a lot less fuel because we didn't have to generate that much steam to heat all this stuff. Again, as the price of gas started going up, up, up, gotta cut more corners and more corners and more corners. Eventually okay, this is not making the money, shut this unit down. This one isn't making, shut it down. Slowly we got to where it was. The powerhouse was getting very old. They used to supply, when I started there, to Fiberglass Canada, Uniroyal, the Research Council, and for Celanese themselves. Four plants they were supplying steam to, and all utilities for there. Then when Uniroyal shut down, okay that was one thing they didn't have. Then Fiberglass, I don't know where they're getting their steam from now, must be from the city, because I think the powerhouse is now shut down.

Q: When a company shuts down, what happens with the land and buildings?

AN: I don't know what's happening now, but I know the plant was put up for sale. Whoever buys it, there's a lot of contaminants in the soil, lots of contaminants. I know for years, I know what happened there. The ground is basically contaminated. It all depends on who's taking it over, if they're willing to clean that up. It's going to be multi-million dollars to clean that up. At the same time, they can sit on it, whoever buys it, and everything's draining into these wells that they bore. They bore these holes all over the place to try and catch all this contaminant that's in the soil, and let it leach down into these holding tanks, and then bring it all back out again. That may take, maybe in 20 years I don't think all of it will ever come out. But at least the effort is there to clean it up. Whoever buys it, they may want to excavate it for a different purpose. I heard through the grapevine that the plant has been sold. I don't know who bought it or what they're going to do with it.

Q: How many people were being employed because of Celanese?

AN: Right around the 1200 mark. The cafeteria part was separate. When it first started, that was part of the union negotiated for the people working in the cafeteria also. Then a contractor took over the cafeteria, so that was deleted.

Q: But still, there were people working there.

AN: Exactly. So the whole picture, I'd say probably 1500 people total. ... I kind of miss the plant. The resources that were there was unbelievable. It didn't matter what. If you had an electrical problem at home, you had 10 electricians. If you had a plumbing problem, you had all your pipefitters there. If you had a carpenter problem, you had carpenters there. You could ask anything you wanted, and get the answer for. That was one of the things I really miss. I like working with things all the time in my garage. If I couldn't make it here, I'd take it back to work. I'd take it to the machine shop and say, I can't make this thing. Oh, give it here, we're running the lathe, we'll spin it. The guy was sitting idle, so he'd make it for me. I'd say, I owe you a beer. That's the way it worked. It built a good bond with the maintenance people. It didn't matter what I couldn't figure out; come here I'll show you. Here, try this, use this.

Q: What about the Beverly Crest?

AN: A lot of people used to go to Beverly Crest from work. They said a lot of times people would come in, when they worked in the xanthatee department...like I said, the people who worked with acrolites stunk really bad. People from xanthates, they used this stuff for, it's very unstable stuff and they used it for mining, for extracting minerals. It stunk something terrible. You had to shower and wear just coveralls and underwear. When you had a shower, you could still smell it when you come home. All my clothes, when the company started supplying us with clothes complete everything. Our clothes come back and they'd say, do you smell vinegar? All our clothes smelled of vinegar, everything. Acetic acid is what it is. I said, oh you get used to it. Oh, you're so strong, you smell so bad. You'd go to Woolco or Walmart, people would smell you. But Beverly Crest, all their money was made out of the Celanese plant. Everybody stopped for a beer there. During construction, that's when Beverly Crest was there, so everybody stopped there for a beer and lunches. Everything was supplied there, through Beverly Crest.

Q: So it's a blow to the whole area.

AN: For everybody. Because the magnitude of the plant, the amount of stuff – tool companies, bearing companies, belt companies. Everybody supplied them. Now they went, all of a sudden no more. All the pulp that we used came from, a lot of it came from in Canada. All of a sudden, BC, Prince Rupert, no more. That has an effect; everything has a big effect on everything.

[END]