

Norm Tropak

Nov. 22, '07

Keywords

Celanese

Blackstone

cellulose acetate

fumes

safety

chemical leaks

explosion

Q: I read the article in the *Edmonton Journal* by Gordon Yaremko that talked about the plant being shut down. It was May 2007, talked about the final shutdown of the plant. It was about the middle of May.

NT: I know when the plant was going down. I was actually at the plant just prior to it shutting down.

Q: That's my question: where were you when the plant was shutting down, and what thoughts did you have about it?

NT: I was at the plant just prior to it shutting down, but I had already taken a package two years previous. But I've been back onsite a few times during short contract work, in the safety aspect of contract work. The remaining people, when I was back here in May, well it was from November to end of April, actually is when I was onsite. I was doing safety work. I that time I was there, CA did their last charges. I was there when they finished and laid all the operations people off. When I left there was nothing running. Methanol had gone down too. Operations was still in, and they were starting to do the cleanup for the shutdown, to get it okayed so they could shut down. At that point I was gone, my contract had expired. But they were still, there was no production onsite, all they were doing was loading methanol cars and getting the methanol offsite and cleaning up the unit. That was from the time they shut down in May until mid-June when the last operational people left. After June all there was was security and a couple maintenance people to cut grass or whatever. And those were all contracted. The only two Celanese employees onsite after mid-June was Andy Day and Derrick Douglas. I think Don Welsh was there, but he was contract I think by then.

Q: A plant shuts down after 50 years of operation. What was the feeling around there?

NT: The feeling, by the shutdown time everybody was resigned to it. But before that, in 2002 and 2003 when they were doing all the initial cutbacks, that was very stressful. There was a lot of stress. There was two or three rounds of packages. The first package went out 2001. Basically it didn't involve operations people, they just cut down on a lot of staff. In upper management, they got rid of a bunch of people there. Then it just kept getting, they'd offer a package here and there was a few people that went, then there'd be

another package. The first real offer to hit maintenance personnel was 2002 or could've been end of 2001. There was a fair number of maintenance people went down.

Operations wasn't touched until they started shutting the units down. I think the biggest amount of discouragement occurred when they shut down the PE unit. They shut down and sold off the vinyl acetate unit. When they shut vinyl acetate down, that was a real, people were really upset with that. Vinyl acetate at the time was making a lot of money. They were making money there, it was a good product, and it cost them a lot of money to get out of these contracts. We just couldn't understand. Well it was American directed. Ever since we got our marching orders from Dallas I think is when we ran into trouble. That's pretty much when things started going downhill fast. Once we lost, I can't remember his name now, but he was the director out of Montreal. He was quite high up, he was Canadian, he was in Montreal. As long as he was there, Celanese in Edmonton here always had good representation globally and whatever. We always had rapport and good representation. But when he died, there was nobody in the upper echelon that had any interest in the Canadian end of it. Our marching orders came out of Charlotte and Dallas, and things just went downhill. I don't have inside knowledge on that, but it's from the rumor mill.

Q: What is your opinion on why it shut down?

NT: I'm sure the decisions to shut down were made three or four years in advance of it actually happening. None of these things happen overnight.

Q: What were the reasons, do you think? Speculate.

NT: Speculation? Global economics, I would think. Basically we started seeing the crunch a couple years back when everything started going to Mexico and offshore. That's when it was getting pretty obvious that we just couldn't stay competitive. They put in a bid, we were going to have an extension of the acetyl plant, and that fell through.

Methanol was the last unit that was built onsite, and even that was hard fought to get it. There was a bid, they wanted to have an anhydride unit put in, and we lost that. After that it was just, you could pretty much see the writing was on the wall that they weren't going to spend any money in Edmonton and keep this plant operational. From that point on, you could see maintenance was being cut back. Fibers, cig tow was riding on its laurels for a long time. They didn't keep up and they just couldn't be competitive enough anymore. They were trying, but they were too far behind. There for a long time we were just coasting. They were making a good product and they weren't spending money to upgrade, they were just riding it. They had already sold the technology to China and they didn't anticipate the Chinese picking up and catching up as fast as they did. That was I think another reason why we've gone down. But that's just speculation on my part; I don't really have any inside knowledge on that.

Q: Well it's not pure speculation, because you know some things about it.

NT: A little bit, ,but I never really did any background study. But just from observations and work, you could see what was happening. You couldn't put your finger on why exactly, but you could see that money wasn't being spent on maintenance. It became more and more apparent as the units started going down. They weren't replacing

equipment. Instead of putting new where you should've been putting new, they were rebuilding and putting it back in just to keep it running. Once, who was it, Blackstone took over, they just ran it till... as long as it was running, that was all they cared. As soon as it broke down, shut her down. There was a few things that had to keep going; those things they spent money on. But anything else that went, if you could do without it, they didn't spend any time or effort to fix it. It was just patch and repair, back like it was in the early '70s before the Germans bought it. When the Germans came in, we had lots of money, they spent a lot of money. We upgraded things, brand new equipment was put in, maintenance was good. You could see things were improving and people were happy. There was a lot of work getting done, our safety records improved. There were people brought in for safety, and the whole aspect of training and empowering people to do their job, all that started in that era.

Q: What years was that?

NT: From the mid '70s, or actually I'd say from the early '80s, through the '80s, all the '80s into the '90s we had, when the plant was doing its best. We were making money and there was a lot of money spent on upgrading people. There was operations, maintenance, you could take courses, you could get self-improvement. There was a lot of that happening. Before that we had a problem. Then after from about the mid '90s when things, once we started losing, once we didn't get a couple of the plants they were bidding on or things you could see sliding. They were cutting back on our training, they were cutting back on, how can I put it?

Q: All the benefits.

NT: Well the benefit packages were basically the same. But the perks, like the extra for getting time to take courses and upgrade yourself, or company-sponsored stuff – those things were cut back. There wasn't as much. Before in the mid '80s and '90s everybody and anybody, if they were interested, they could take first-aid courses, get on the fire crews, or whatever, and contribute. After that only specific people were offered the opportunity. It became more, how can I put it, selective.

Q: How did you come to work at Celanese?

NT: When I first went in, I started work at Celanese in August of '68. I was hired as a lab tech but I never actually worked as a lab tech. I went from lab tech in one hour to an operations person, and started as an operator trainee in CA unit, which is the cellulose acetate unit.

Q: Why?

NT: Why? Well because operations was shift work, you had shift premium, and the pay was better than the lab techs, which was a straight day job. I wasn't that keen on, when I looked at their lab, it wasn't state of the art. It was a pretty crude lab. Operations was spending money and upgrading equipment, so I thought there was a better opportunity in operations. It was shift work, which didn't bother me at all. That's why I decided to go into operations.

Q: What does an operator do?

NT: I was in the Celanese cellulose acetate unit. What we did, well I started as an operator trainee, and my first job was working in the shredders. What we did there, the pulp comes in on a big roll and you fit it through a mill, which shredded it. It goes through a process, and we produce cellulose acetate flake. I became an operator trainee and went through operations. There was about five different units, and you'd learn the process. Each process is, it was just CA is a batch process, it's not a continuous process. You'd have so many batches and you'd be working charge rate. You'd make so many charges in a shift. I went through that and I was there for a good number of years. Then I worked on the other side of the wall, which is the AR unit, which is acid recovery unit. I was in acid recovery for some time; there's operators in there. At that time, in the early '70s, we also used to produce a product which was called xanthate, which is used in the floatation of minerals. It was a separate unit. It was attached to the AR unit but it's a separate entity. I operated in that unit for some time too.

Q: Tell high school kids what it's like to be an operator.

NT: But it's changed an awful lot. In '68 you'd have a panel, your wall would be a wall of lights and buttons. You'd be at a desk with a paper sheet and you'd be checking. You'd have to fill in every few minutes, you'd have to check that you didn't miss a process. You'd have to go push buttons or run into the unit and open or close a valve to add product or add acid to the line, depending what it was. It's a batch process. It wasn't

continuous. Depends on where you are, what kind of operation you're doing, it really varied.

Q: What happens if you miss a process? Did you ever have a problem?

NT: What happens, it's a batch process. You put the product in, it has a time duration, it goes through a cycle of magging and neutralizing, then you'd dump it into another vessel. If we had a spreadsheet I could show you how it would work. What happened in this particular case, it was a nightshift and I was tired, it was early in the morning. I dropped the charge and forgot to close the valve. I dropped another charge into it on top. Obviously the tank is only designed to hold so much, and if you put too much in it's going to be all over the place. So we had acid and fumes and you had to put on a mask and there's a massive cleanup. You lose...

Q: Is there a total shutdown of the unit at that time?

NT: No, there's not a shutdown of the unit, it's a shutdown of one particular line until you clean it up. What it means is you lose a few charges, but the unit doesn't actually shut down. It was a batch process. It's not like a continuous production. Like if you lose a tower in AR, you shut down the unit. But in CA unit, because it's a batch process, you can isolate the line and bypass it while you're cleaning it up. But that changed over the years. This was in the late '60s early '70s, then they started automating everything. By 2000 when the operators that were left there operating in CA, a few of them didn't even know the lines in the unit, because it was all done by computer. You just hit a button and



everything was done automatically, and you just watched it on a screen. They managed to still make the odd mistake, but you weren't out in the unit, you weren't in the fumes, you're isolated from the unit. There was somebody on the floor all the time and you also had numbers of people cut back, because you're automating, you're losing people. Every time they automated, we lost another operator or two.

Q: Tell me about the fumes.

NT: When I first started there we used to work with benzene, formaldehyde, acetone, acetic acid, sulfuric acid, those were some of the chemicals. Then there's your pulp, which is cellulose acetate, which is your paper, it was pretty benign. But the benzene, when we first started there we used to wash our hands in it, wash our paint brushes in it, you never treated it as a hazard. Now, so many parts per million, you gotta be wearing a mask, because it's carcinogenic. But when we first started, nobody informed us. And it's a noisy unit, there's a lot of noise. When we first started, we had to fight for years, literally for years, to get hearing protect because it was so noisy. That wasn't provided. When I first started, even though I wasn't involved in safety, I was still quite surprised how little safety there was onsite. It changed over the years. Over the years the plant became very safety conscious and very good in terms of safety. But initially there was a lot of cuts and scrapes and accidents; people not necessarily losing limbs, but a lot of injuries that could've easily been avoided with some preventive safety. Not necessarily personal safety, but equipment design and a whole bunch of different aspects of safety. Their first initial thing, well if you get hurt it's your fault, nothing to do with the company or the way the equipment is designed. But we slowly over the years, through the union, we

fought and we got quite a bit of involvement, and improved the safety standards. I think a lot of people leaving the site now, when I talk to them in the last few years, they're amazed at how far advanced we had been. When they go out to these places where they are now, to see how far behind the safety is in comparison to where we had brought the levels up to, is surprising. I've seen a few times. Even you take a place here even just within the last year, AP Plastics, where we had people, Celanese was involved at both places. The safety over there was just appalling in comparison to what we took for granted now.

Q: Did the union have a lot to do with the safety?

NT: We had a joint health and safety committee. The health and safety committee was a joint venture between the union and the company. It involved the hygiene department, people from management, people from the safety area of the plant, and from the union. Usually the most active people were from the labs, because they had more time to devote time to it. There was always a representative from the maintenance department, representative from the operations department. The health and safety committee usually consisted of about 8 or 9 people. The different units had an operator representing them, maintenance would have one or two people representing them, and management would have one or two people representing them, plus the safety department. Issues that would come off the floor would be brought to the health and safety committee's meeting, and decisions for action to be taken were done there. There was a time limit set as to when this could be done, and cost. It would have to be reported on. Every month they'd have a meeting to see what the status of different projects were. Some of the things could be

simple. If it was a real safety issue you didn't have to wait for health and safety to get involved, you just got to your foreman and let's get this done right now. But stuff that took a little more effort or was something that was brought up, like say maybe we could use a safety shower at a particular pump because there's always a potential of the flange leaking or a seal going and it could create a problem. Things like that, where it would require some engineering – that sort of thing is what the safety committee got involved in, and the logistics of how to do it or what has to be done to improve the safety aspects of it. Actually, the health and safety committee didn't start till the mid '80s. Before that there was negotiations and a lot of it was left up to negotiation time when the contract expired. The company held safety as a perk – well we'll do this if you, it was a tradeoff. The health and safety committee was actually negotiated to get the committee to start with, it was negotiated through the union, it was part of a negotiated into our contract. Otherwise we never would've had that. Alberta's got terrible labour laws.

Q: Did you get involved in any other union functions?

NT: When I first started, about 3 months after I started, I was approached to join the union, or within the first 3 month probation period I was approached to join the union. And I did. I became a steward for a number of years in the CA unit; I was a steward and then I was the area steward for the CAR unit. I spent one year as secretary-treasurer of our local, actually 2 years. Of the Celanese unit. The Celanese unit, I was the secretary-treasurer for 2 years. At that time Stan Stark was the president. He's passed away. And Morris Stark, he was our chief steward. He's passed away too. A lot of guys that I've worked with over the years are gone. Stan passed away quite a while back. He was in operations.

Q: What kind of man was he?

NT: Stan, I liked Stan. A lot of people found him hard, because he was very bullheaded. When he got an idea in his mind, he'd push it. He had good ideas, but I think he was a bit ahead of his calling. He saw things coming down the pipe that other people never saw. I liked Stan, I liked working with him. But he was quite headstrong. He was very confrontational. I don't think management got along with him very well at all. There used to be some real standoffs. I think both company and union suffered as a result of it, because there was a lot of personality clashes with Stan and some of the people around him. Management people at that time, there were some pretty hard eggs there. That was in the earlier days. Then we got a few other guys involved, and they were a lot more flexible. I got out of the union for a couple of personal reasons. One of them was I found that the union, like everything else, you start in with intentions of working for your fellow workers. I sat on negotiations, I was on negotiations for 2 contracts, and they left a very bad taste in my mouth both times.

Q: Tell us why, so people can learn from your experience.

NT: I found that you get coerced.

Q: By?

NT: By the union and by management. There was perks offered. It's subtle, it's not blatant. You look at this and agree to this, and we'll give you a little benefit on the side. It's never out in the open. I sat in on 2 rounds of negotiations. The company and the union would sit there and negotiate. You want to prevent a strike, you're negotiating all night,

you're too tired to think straight. The national director comes down and twists your arm a little bit. The company comes in and they twist your arm a little bit more. You just get worn down to a point where, okay, this is the best we're going to get, and you sign it. Then you go and have a big meal and everybody shakes hands, and you get a little perk here and there. That's one reason why I got out of the union, because I did not like the way... You're basically trying to work for the best interests of the people, but I'm sure the pressure is the same in politics too. You get, well we gave you this, we expect you to do this in return. Even though it's really never said that way, but that's the way it comes out.

Q: Were the members supportive of the union?

NT: When we went on strike there was a lot of support.

Q: When did you go on strike?

NT: We went on strike in '70 or '71, somewhere in there.

Q: Why did you have to go on strike?

NT: There was a couple of reasons. One of the biggest reasons we had to go on strike was they were trying to, we had different unions. This is when we had a number of different unions. They were amalgamating the unions, and by doing that they were trying to force us to take a rollback. This is when Trudeau was in power; we had wage freeze. Once that was lifted, we had given up a lot. When negotiations came up, they didn't want to, the other industries, or others in the same industries were being given better contracts than we were. Because we were a national bargaining, which was what the company wanted, and basically they wanted to break national bargaining so they forced us to go on

strike. We were out for some time, but I don't think we actually gained a lot by the strike at all. I think it was about 2 or 3 months.

Q: What was it like when you were on strike? Did the member support remain strong?

NT: The support was very good when we first went out. A lot of people walked the picket lines. There were a lot of volunteers. The support on the strike was very good, actually. But that was about the strongest the union was, from the time of the strike until we got back to work. Then the next contract, there was still a lot of strength there. Then from about the mid '80s on, the union support wasn't as intense. You still had, but you weren't getting as much union involvement, you were having as much union talk on the floor, and as much members getting involved in the different parts of the union as there was in the mid '70s and early '80s. After that, you had to really work to get people to be stewards.

Q: Maybe things were a bit too good.

NT: In a way, ya. Well they were never too good, but we had committees. The people that were in the union were taking a lot more on. We were finding it hard to get stewards involved, and do steward training, and to get people involved in the union. It was getting harder and harder. Operations was backing off. Maintenance had other unions that they would join or be members of. It was just a lot hard to get the support.

Q: Did you get involved with the AFL?

NT: We went to a couple of provincial meetings when I was secretary-treasurer of our local. I was involved at the provincial meetings. I went with Stan to Hamilton for one of

our national meetings. I was down there and we did that. I was involved at a couple of those meetings.

Q: What did you think of the AFL in those days?

NT: They were trying. They were trying to lobby the government, a lot of lobbying. As to how much success they had, well I don't think there has been that much success, because our labor laws in this province haven't really improved that much over all these years. They did try, they were trying. Reg Basken was quite involved. I guess he's involved with the NDP now here provincially quite a bit. He was quite involved. He used to talk a good storm. He was a very sharp guy, I liked Reg. But we always had trouble. We just never got the government to...like I've said before, our labour laws in this province have always been way behind the 8 ball. They try to tell us we don't need organized labor, but...

Q: Did the union get involved in environmental issues?

NT: Ya. The environmental aspects, there was a lot of concern expressed to the company. But until the provincial government actually got involved with air monitoring and testing, there's very little done. The people that had the most effect on environmental control at a plant would be people in the labs. They seem to be the most aware of the hazards and risks involved with a lot of the chemicals. Operations, the operators in the different units were very aware of the chemical they worked with, but not so much from the environmental aspects.

Q: Describe some of the concerns around emissions?

NT: Environmentally there was a lot of stuff done over the years which, that's probably the reason the plant is having so much trouble being sold, is because nobody wants to pick up the liability. There's a lot of liability. In the last few years they spent a lot of time digging up the ponds and trying to reclaim the land. But as far as what's there for chemicals, I'm not sure. That's one reason they haven't been able to sell the plant, is because nobody wants to pick up the liability. They bought that gravel pit next door because of all the chemicals leeching in there. I used to work in utilities; I went from operations into utilities for some time. We had holding ponds in the back, and those ponds, I don't know what was in there. They were supposedly lime, but they leached. But the chemicals in there, they're open to the atmosphere. They're great big ponds, a few million gallons in each pond, much like retaining sediment for oilfields; they have their sediment basins so everything settles out. Well these ponds were basically the same; everything evaporated into the atmosphere. When I was working in utilities, when we used to go and check these ponds and pumps, you'd see from the river into the fresh water pond where we brought water in, off the river it would be relatively clean into our first bays. We'd bring the water in and treat it there with copper sulfate. You'd see everything get wiped out instantly, the fish and any life. Then the water was pumped into the ?, but basically still that should've never happened, and it did. Also in the pond you'd see ducks or geese flying over. If they were too close to the water, they never got across the pond. They'd be flying along and...

Q: What kind of stuff was in the ponds?

NT: It was supposed to just be waste water, but it never was. There was chemicals in there, there'd be all sorts of chemicals: ethanol, formaldehyde, acid from AR unit, from



the LPO unit there'd be benzene, a whole entourage of chemicals. There'd be vinyl acetate or whatever else, but it would be waste water. There'd be caustic soda in there, and all this stuff evaporates and it was just a toxic soup. I was always amazed at how bad it was, how lax. The government was supposedly doing their test monitoring, but very few times you ever heard of it. The only time when the government would be involved is when there was failure and the units vented stuff into the atmosphere, that's when the government was involved. You had to report it.

Q: Citizens in the area would notice it.

NT: Ya, they'd sniff it and you could smell that there was a bad leak or whatever. Especially stuff like anhydride. It doesn't take very much, but you can really smell it. It burns your eyes fairly quickly. If you got the wrong winds, it would blow into Beverly and people would be screaming right quick about this thing from Celanese. But a lot of times it wasn't actually us. A lot of that smell came out of the fiberglass plants. But that's beside the point. We did have our share, like when LPO unit used to have a couple things which are very bad. When you had a leak there it was bad, you could smell it in the city pretty quick and they'd have to really get on top of it.

Q: How important was the social aspect of the plant?

NT: There was a Triple C club. The Triple C club was very good. When I first started there, there used to be them and us, them being the company and management side, and us being the workers. That was union non-union. That barrier stayed there until well after the strike. Probably about the mid '80s you started to get a lot better cooperation, not only between management and union people, but between management and operations, and

operations and maintenance. Because even operations and maintenance, there was always this, well they're operations, we're maintenance, we don't get along. It took a lot of years to get everybody more or less; the Triple C club was a big incentive and big help in having social get-togethers and things, so that everybody started to mix. You used to get a lot of camaraderie. People would join different clubs and get out and go curling. There used to be curling, and you'd get a mix of operation people and maintenance and staff people. They'd be together, not just union curling or whatever. That was pretty much done when times were good, that's when started you used to get a lot better cooperation among people. It reflected in the plant too. When people knew each other, knew who they were, different trades and operations and maintenance and staff, when they worked socially together, in the plant you saw a reflection of better cooperation. A lot of things were done, a lot of things that needed to be done, instead of waiting for the directions to come, which proper channels... The way it used to be, nobody moved unless they were told to move. When things improved, people used to get the initiative, take on the initiative, and go and do things that needed to be done. There was a lot of that. When times were good, that's what happened.

Q: When was the plant at its height?

NT: I'd say that would be the early '80s, most of the '80s.

Q: How many people were employed?

NT: At the height we had around 700 people onsite. Then you'd have your contractors. There was always on average in those years, cuz there was always something going on, so we'd have anywhere from 30 to 50 contractors onsite at all times, not counting the

trucks. Well most of the stuff went out on rail anyway, so that didn't change much. But the trucks came in, and there was a lot more trucking coming in, deliveries and so on. There'd be another 30 or 40 people pretty regular. But as things tapered off...

Q: When did people first start noticing a wind down?

NT: I'd say it started around '95. The first thing that started happening was cutbacks in upper management. There was quite a cutback in upper management. Some of the stuff that was done in the plant in administration was taken offsite. We lost a lot of people there. They were non-union people, but not management people – secretaries, clerical jobs. That was probably the first sign of things. There was a lot of initial upper management jobs, and then a lot of directions were not coming from, the decisions weren't being made here. Our plant manager was no longer our plant manager' he was a site assistant or site manager, he wasn't a plant manager. His orders came from somewhere else. The decisions weren't being made here. I think Brownley was our last manager who was actually a manager who actually had any influence in what was actually being done here. After that, quite a number of people had gone through in that position. They'd come in as hatchet men, do whatever they had to do and cut whatever they had to do, and they'd move on and somebody else would come in.

Q: In terms of production, what were the first things to be cut back?

NT: Production never actually got cut back. The units would be running and then all of a sudden the decision was made, we're shutting this unit down.

Q: What were some of the first ones to go?

NT: Some of the first ones to go were, the first unit to go was probably PE, pentaethachloride or whatever it was. That was one of the first units to go. It was followed by, I think the one that really made the initial real impression was when we lost vinyl acetate. We never did understand that one, because like I said earlier, vinyl acetate was making money, it was a good product. We had the technology, it was a priority product, it was trade protected, they didn't want to lose it. And they decided to shut it down, sell it off somewhere. After that we lost our acid plant, which was LPO, liquid oxidation plant. We lost the oxygen unit. Those were the first ones that went; CA and fibers kept on running. I should back up further yet, because we lost xanthate plant. The xanthate plant, that was back in the mid '80s when that went. But everybody wanted to see it go, nobody wanted xanthates. It was an ugly product. They used to use different alcohols and caustic soda to make xanthate, which was a material used in floatation of chemicals. It was very unstable, very reactive. You look at it cross-eyed and it would blow up on you. It was wicked stuff, a wicked, wicked product to work with. I should know. I walked in Christmas eve, 1971, Christmas eve. Two hours later I was at the Royal Alec hospital in emergency. I got blown out of the building. We had an explosion. There was 2 of us, 3 of us actually got blown right out of the building. I was off work for a few months; I had 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns on my face.

Q: From xanthate?

NT: From xanthate, ya. The unit blew. Because it's such an unstable product, it's another batch process, but it was, we used to have it under a nitrogen blanket. Everything done in the unit was under a nitrogen blanket. Sometimes our nitrogen blanket would fail or air would get into the system. As soon as we had enough air, it would just spontaneous

combustion. You'd open the bin to have an inspection, and nitrogen blanket usually keeps everything controlled so you could see. But if there's no nitrogen blanket, you opened the door and a ball of flame came out and blew us out of the building. So that was interesting, I spent a few months out.

Q: You spent Xmas day in the hospital?

NT: I spent more than Xmas day, I spent about 10 months in the hospital. There was a couple of us in the hospital together. One of the operators, his name was Milton Zaphadi, and he was from Trinidad. He was working with me that day. All you could see, we were suited up; you had your coveralls on, you had your goggles on, you had your hardhat on, you had a mask on. A dust mask, we just had paper dust masks, which after all we've learned, they're absolutely useless. They might've stopped particles the size of a golf ball, but they didn't stop much else. But when we got blown out of the building, I had some burns, Milton had some burns but he was dark complexion. Not black, but he was Trinidadian, but quite dark complexion. But where his goggles were protecting him, the rest of his face, once he healed up, he looked like he was wearing a mask all the time. His skin went white after. He lost his pigmentation because of the explosion, so he looked like a lone ranger all the time after that. He was like that for quite a few years. I don't know whatever happened to him. I know he was in a band and a musician, but I think he went goth or something and nobody really knew the difference after awhile. But he was quite the character. We were lucky nobody got killed in that one.

Q: When the cutbacks were happening, what was management saying?

NT: Restructuring, that was the catchphrase – we're restructuring, they were restructuring. They're not shutting down, we're just restructuring. That was the catchphrase. They never were shutting down, but they were restructuring.

Q: How long did they keep that up?

NT: About five years. From '95 till 2000 it was a lot of shuffling. The morale in the plant in 2000 and from that point on, morale was just ugly. The units were being shut down, people were being relocated, nothing was being told. Other than telling us that they were restructuring, they never actually told us what was going on. You'd learn more reading the *Journal* as to what actually was going on than from what was being told to us in the plant, for a while there. Then after a while they started having these, what did they call them, town hall meetings. They'd call people in and explain or tell us that in 3 months or 6 months your unit's going down. They started doing that in about mid-2000 area. It was always restructuring. Then they started talking layoffs. It was never permanent layoffs. They'd shut one unit down. There was a classic, they did it following the classic example. There was a book I read that had it spelled out the way they did it. I can't remember the name of the book. It was a classic way of first they basically gutted the union and overruled the contracts, and just carried on from there.

Q: When did it become obvious that the end was in sight? Was that when you took the payout?

NT: Ya. When I took the package... To me, it was obvious when we lost vinyl acetate unit. But to a lot of people it wasn't obvious until quite some time after. When I took the package, at that time I predicted the plant would be down in 5 years. Well actually I was

wrong, it was 7 years. It was 2000 when I said by 2005 this plant would be gone. So it was 2007. It was pretty sad. From 2000 on, the morale in the plant was bad, and it was just not a fun place to be anymore.

Q: What do you think of when you look at the plant now?

NT: I'm sad to see it gone, in a way. I've been involved with the decommissioning of some of it. A lot of the plant is a lot different now than it was 5 years ago. They've knocked down a lot of buildings. All of SO is gone and all of LPO is gone, all the PE is gone, all the VA is gone. Gone, demolished. It was scrapped. They brought in Murray Demolition and they chopped everything up. It was put on flat decks and shipped out to smelters. Most of it went to Chicago. It wasn't dismantled or anything, it was just chopped up and gone. Now they're getting rid of the methanol unit. From what I heard, methanol is going to be sectioned out, they're going to take it apart and build it somewhere in Asia or Europe, from what I heard. This is just the latest story, but this is where I might be working on the safety aspect of that, for the decommissioning of that portion. As far as CA and fibers unit, I think it's going to just be demolished.

Q: That's a good place to end. Thanks a lot.

[ END ]