

2016

Steve Senio

My name is Steven Senio. I was born September 2nd, 1914. In Leduc, Alberta. That's right.

I was raised in Calmar, Alberta. My parents came from Ukraine. My dad come from Jaroslaw, some kind of a province or other. And my mother came from Tuchary. Yarislov is currently located against the Polish border, and he was kind of on the border. Tuchary is a little bit east of that, but not far.

Oh, I guess about 1905 or 1912 or somewhere in there.

My dad was 19 I think, when he got married. My mother was 16 or something like that. Farmers. They were farming in the Calmar area. When my dad first come to this country, he came with his brother-in-law and his older sister. He was an orphan. His parents had passed away. So, she looked after him. He came with them and they settled in the Calmar area. He was raised there. When he got to be 16 or 17, he went to work for CPR on the section gang for the city in Leduc. So I was born in Leduc. Humble School, district #532, which was 5-1/2 miles south of Calmar, until I completed grade 7. I was 15. I had to start a year older, because my sister was a year younger and my mother wanted me to not go to school till my sister was of age to go to school. So we went to school together, so I could keep her company.

At 15 I started out working on the farm for the neighbor in the fall, threshing. I threshed for 32 days for my neighbor and did some plowing. Then from there I jumped the bike and went to Edmonton. 1930. I worked around Edmonton on the dairies to start with. That's all I knew, was farming and dairy work.

In 1936, I left where Sherwood Park is now, which was all farming community then, and went to Vancouver. That's where I landed in the fall of 1936. I went onto Lulu Island for work, mainly dairy work. I found dairies that I got employment in, in Lulu Island, Steveston, that area. I spent a few years there.

I ended up working for summer employment at Agassi's Experimental Station. Then they released about six of us. I had a letter from Edmonton Air to come back, because they needed people for harvesting. So, a guy by the name of Jim Reed and I, Jim come from Saskatchewan, the two of us thought we'd experiment. We had lots of money, we could've paid our fare, but we decided to ride the freight. So, we rode the freight back to Edmonton. That was 1938. That's when I came back.

First day back I cut my fingers off, three of them. I was trying to fix a motor and putting my wrench in between the chain drive and tighten the tappets on the motor. The wrench was an open end one and was a little too large. The nut was greasy. As I put the tension on there the thing slipped, and my hand hit the chain and drove my hand into the gears and stalled the motor. Then I had to take it apart to get my hand out, and that was it. I was convalescing for quite a while. After that I got a job harvesting. A fellow in the Salisbury

area offered me a job to run the tractor on the binder. He said, Steve, I think you can handle that with one hand. I said, I don't know. He said, I know you can, you just come out and try it. So, I did. I spent my time doing that.

When I finished that, I was unemployed for a month or two, and I got a job with the Department of Public Works, Bridge Branch, building bridges and ferries. So that's when I started, in '38, for the Alberta government. That's where I did steel bridges and started my iron work trade, erecting the steel and riveting them. I spent a bit of time with them. We had the territory up to Jasper. Each crew has a territory or zone. Our zone was up to Jasper, back down east to Wainwright, north up to Manning area. These were highway bridges, Department of Highways for the government, strictly bridges on the highways. They had their own crews. They had their own foremen, they had their own camps. We'd build steel bridges in the winter time, and in the summer time we'd build rural bridges for municipalities. In the early spring sometimes, if a ferry was needed somewhere, we'd build a ferry. That's how they divided it. In the winter time build steel bridges, because you use ice for work off the river. Wages? I got all my work slips downstairs. Ninety cents an hour, that's what I got working for the government. As a qualified bridge man. [before in the dairies] That was \$25 a month, and your board and room. And your laundry done and everything else.

That was established by the government here in Alberta. By representation by contractors building during the war. There is a *Gazette* I left with the union hall, which indicated that ironworkers were named in there, and their conditions of employment. The jurisdiction of the ironworkers and their wages were set at 90 cents an hour.

They didn't have an apprenticeship program. They just started you if you were able to catch on to do the job in a while, then they paid you top wages.

There was a lot of unemployment, lots of people out of work. In the city here they had a big unemployment center where the market square is today. That's where they fed the people. The reason I say that is I was already working for the government. My supervisor or foreman was a friend of a fellow that operated a relief camp feeding the unemployed. We used to meet in one of the old hotels for a beer or two, then he'd tell us all about it. That was the 1930s when unemployment was I guess across Canada. The people were out of work. But there was a relief program in effect, and of course they gave you a few dollars a week to live on. But I never took advantage of any government tolls, never. I looked for work. A lot of people would get tired of it. People that were middle aged and married had more money if they went to work, but there was no work for them. I knew quite a few. See those trees on Whyte Avenue there in the boulevard? The fellow in charge there was on relief. He happened to be married to my first cousin. I remember when they planted them. They gave him a week's work, then he had relief for a month. When they asked you you had to do it. If you refused, you didn't get any more relief.

I don't remember that too well. I was pretty young then. My concern was about working, I wasn't looking at the outside world much.

I enlisted ok. I'll give you a bit of background there. We were building a ferry in Heinsberg, past St. Paul. We had it pretty well built. You build the bottom first, then roll it over and put the deck on. We were just about ready to do that in the morning. But the ice went out on the river and it took the tower down at Elk Point. The boss and truck driver went there, and I went down with the post office kid, and he showed me on the river where the ice piled up a mile high. I come back to the bank of the river where we had our camp in the town of Heinsburg. The men were working. I asked them what they were doing. They said, we're trying to get this ferry uphill. . . . But they thought the river was high and it might take the ferry with it, so they were working to pull the ferry uphill. They're old men. Carpenters there 60 years old and whatnot. I said, I'll take my clothes off, I'll put my work clothes on, I'll go underneath there and hook the cables together and bring them out. You guys just hand them to me. You had to put the cables on the outside underneath, and someone underneath the ferry would have to pick them up and hand them in through the center opening to pull it uphill. So I went underneath. I no more than got underneath, I could see the water building up on my boots. I knew damn well I was going to have to lay down in that water to go out. I could hear somebody up on the bank, the whole town was assembled there, and somebody hollered, that man better get the hell out of there because he's going to get locked up. I heard that, but I was already trying to get out and couldn't get out. I tried to put my head through and I just barely got it through. Had a little trouble with my shoulders, but I put my arms forward. A guy on each arm pulled me through. But when I got to the hips, I got stuck. The ferry was on a slope, the water was building up to my escape on top. They couldn't pull me out. So the ferry was riding on my hips, and the water kept coming up. It eventually leveled the ferry up, and it lifted off my back. The water lifted the ferry off my back. That's a 42 foot ferry, 24 foot wide, made out of timber. Tarred and ready to go. Except the end was open because that's where the aprons are fastened. That's the last thing you do. That's how I had to come out from underneath. I got caught.

So I was under compensation, so I couldn't enter the services. I was on compensation, and arrangements were made with the government that they'd pay me so much, and I could go to work. I was on compensation and the government made an application and had me come out. They paid some and the compensation board paid me some. The fellow I was working for said all I need to do is drive the car into town, pick up the mail, and stuff like that. So, I could work there, so I did. Finally, I got OK'd, and ended up doing a steel bridge at Ft. Saskatchewan. When it was finished, I went to enlist in the army. That was in early '42. I got accepted.

That's when I entered the army, in '42. I was in the army, and did my basic training at Camrose. Then they did an interview to see what area you want to go into. I selected tanks. I thought this was going to be a real good deal, sitting on a tank. Heavy metal, safe. He said no, I was categorized B1. If I'd have got the category B2 I wouldn't have been in the army. Because of my injury. The first route march I took in Camrose, the 5-mile route march with packsack of 40 pounds, that's when my injury showed up on my leg. Because I had a pelvis fracture to begin with, when I got crushed. I got a big lump on my groin. So

I said to the doctor and he took me off all the route marches. But they kept me in the army anyway. So, then I wanted to go truck driving, because I used to do pile driving for the government as well. No, that was too rough, B1 wouldn't qualify me to go there. So I said to the officer, I've never been in the army before. You tell me where I fit. He said, how about if we send you to Kingston on a course? I said, ok, if you think that's where I belong, that's where I'll go. So, I went to Kingston. I went on a mechanical course down there.

By November I was on the draft for overseas and I went overseas. November of '42. I landed in Scotland and went to a place called Whitley in England for my advance infantry training. I spent that winter in the infantry training. I finished my course there, then they sent me to Borden. That's where belonged. If you take that mechanical course, you go to Borden. That's where the trade people went. That's in England. Som I went over to Borden. I was there a day or 2 and the call came out on the parade that the 3rd Infantry Division needed some truck drivers. They wanted volunteers to go truck driving. So I volunteered to go. Went to a place called Horley, and that's where sub park was located. We went on a scheme called the Spartan Scheme. Out for 3 days and nights, then came back. After that I stayed there for a while sorting out auto parts. The sub park supplied the workshops with auto parts. ? approached me to recommend me for advance corporal's position. I knew a fellow there took the course properly, ordnance and procedure course. I didn't have it, he did. He had to have that. I said no, I wouldn't want to get in on somebody else's list. I said no thanks, I'll have to decline. So, I let it go. So I stayed there and started arguing. I said I'm entitled to trades pay because of my completion in Kingston. I was supposed to get trades pay. They said, we got 5 people already in your category and we can't do it. All we're allowed is 5, unless somebody leaves. So, I kept on working away. One day the sergeant major come along and said, I want to see you in my office. Went in there and he said, we're going to send you for a test for ordnance clerk.

He said, I know you didn't take ordnance procedure, but we're sending guys that did. There's 22 going, and you're going with them. I'll tell you what the questions might be. So he gave me a bunch of questions and the answers. It was in terms of military answers, which I wasn't aware of too much. So, he gave it to me. So, I went with this group for a test. The first one was a written test. I didn't do very well. I answered the best I knew how, but I knew it wasn't working right. The other 50% was identifying the parts. Take you in the big warehouse, and they had all kinds of car parts, vehicles they had in the army. The corporal led you. What's this? A steering wheel. What's it for? What type of vehicle. A Ford. What's this? A carburetor. It's for a Chev? Why? So I got 50% on that one, I knew all the parts, because I took them at Kingston. So, when we got back to the unit and the results came. Out of the 23 of us, I was the only god darned guy that passed it. They gave it to me because I was 100% on parts. They weren't worried about the ordnance and procedure stuff, because you'd learn paperwork anyway. So I got my trades pay, got my extra two bits. They probably got \$1.50 day, I got \$1.75. Can you close off that machine? . . .

I stayed on as ordnance clerk #2. They give you #2 with the increase of pay. You were in charge of all small parts for vehicles. The motorcycles would be the Harley and Norton. Then the Studebaker equipment and Ford and Chev and some carriers. Heavier parts were handled by someone else. We had 5 vehicles loaded with ...

I got to France by D-Day. In Normandy, and went right through until we hit Odenberg, Germany. I didn't get there the first day. I was in ordnance then. You have to have the infantry, engineers, and all those people first. The important ones are engineers, because they have to clear mines out of the way. You sat on barges waiting for this. I got called on June 9th to go in. When you invade, you got no territory. Only what you are standing on now. After you get away about 20 km then more people come in ... One enemy aircraft come and drop a bomb, you got a bunch of people. This way you spread them out. You don't call for them till you can make sure ...

Spent a lot of time in Holland. Not much in Belgium, but Belgium was not in the war. We went right through Belgium Holland was a stop point, till we were ready to cross the Rhine River. Cease fire was declared, the word got around. Everything stayed still. You couldn't talk to any civilians, just to yourselves. They arrived about 5 days. They were going to let you go out on the town on your own. You must hand in all your weapons, so we handed in trucks took the weapons to the depot. We were without an ammunition or weapons, so we could go walking around town and be safe. If you had a schnapps someplace, you weren't going to start a fight.

It was all done very orderly. It's over with, now you wonder if they're going to send you home. But they send you back to a whole new unit. We went back to Dimagen in Holland. That's where they started dispatching you to different places for your medical and dental. So you're ready to go home. When your number comes, you get on the ship and go to England. In the meantime, you worked in depots. In worked in Arnam, they truck in all this material because there's room there. It wasn't a city, kind of a small town. They loaded at the railroad stations. Myself and a fellow from the south side here, the 2 of us were clerks. So, we were checking these boxes out, numbers, and making sure the cases were ok and tight, and pass them through. If a board got broken on a wooden case, it's referred back to the carpenters. The carpenters were there and they'd fix the boards and pile them up in the railway station. Piled high up to the roof, all kinds of stuff. ? equipment went to Suffield Alberta. German binoculars went to Ottawa. How I know is because a board was broken so I had to return it back. I said to the guy, you check what's in there. I was interested in getting a German air force wristwatch. People were swiping anyway. That was not done that way, there's not a procedure for that. The officers received all that stuff, the watches and that.

I landed in Halifax on January 1st, 1946. I came back on the *Mauritania*.

Got to Halifax, boarded on the trains, and headed for home. I got to Edmonton on January 6th, Ukrainian Xmas eve. My relatives down here came to pick me up. My dad was out on the farm at Calmar. He didn't come in, because they were going to pick me up. They picked me up for my Christmas eve supper. I hit it just right.

I worked at Agassi's Experimental Station in BC as a seasonal worker. 1938. In the fall, after haying was done, they released the surplus workers. So, a bunch of us got let go. A fellow from Saskatchewan, Jimmy Reed, and I decided we were going to go to Edmonton. I had a letter from Edmonton to come here because they needed people for harvest. A fellow that was in charge of the orchards at that experimental station was going to Kamloops by car. They had a field there of experimental apple trees and he was going to check them out. He said, look, I'm going to Kamloops, if you guys want a ride, I like company, so come with me. So, we did. We dressed up and through our luggage in his car, and away we went. We went to Kamloops with him. So, we got to Kamloops, we went to the railway station, found out the information when the freights were leaving. Got that. Went into a booth, switched our clean dress clothes, put them in a packsack, took out our old jeans and jackets, put them on, ready to catch our freight. We were going to ride a freight. We had lots of money. I still distinctly remember having \$500 in the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Victory Square in Vancouver. So, I could've paid for it, but I didn't.

We decided to experiment and get some riding freight trains. So Jim and I decided to ride the freight trains. We stuck in about \$50 in our boots and waited for a freight train to come in. There wasn't one coming in to go east until 11 o'clock at night. So we sat around in the afternoon and evening. By the time 11 o'clock come along, it started to drizzle rain. That was bad. But we waited, and all of a sudden we heard this freight train coming through. We inquired and the guy said, yes that's the train. They were watching. We weren't boarding it until they started moving. So, the freight train started moving, and we started moving to catch it. We were told to catch the front ladder of the car, not the back one. If you grabbed it and it swung you back and you had to lose your grip, the boxcar would throw you off the tracks. If you used that one, if you broke lose you'd fall in between the cars. So, therefore, you'd be caught. So, in the total dark I went ahead and grabbed a ladder and got it ok and got up on top and walked around a little bit waiting for Jim to show up. He didn't show up.

I found a spot on the engine; they were riding those boards on deck there over the coal bit. It was hot. That's where the guys used to sit and ride on the engines. So I sat there for a while and Jim didn't show up. So, I go walking around and I don't find him. Just a while after that, he shows up. Apparently, he hadn't got up on top yet. He was hanging on down below on a ladder. So, we both rode the freight for experience only. Not that we needed to, but that we thought we'd try it. Everybody else... And we had good cooperation from the train crew. The engineers would say, ok we're going to have a tough time at Blue River. That's where they're going to check very close. They told us not to go to CP in Calgary because that's where they were very active. The police were knocking the guys off. So, we went CN. We got to Blue Ridge and they stopped there to take on water and some fuel coal. We never moved. We stayed right on there and nobody bothered us. But the engineer said, look, we're going to go through Redpath. Redpath is where we stop because there's a station there. It's going to be daylight by then. You guys better keep your eyes open or hide someplace, because the police will be checking. I said,

ok. We were getting near Red Path and I said to my friend, we'd better start checking out lumber cars, But they were refrigerator cars, once you got in you couldn't get out. So we wouldn't go in there. Jim said, what side is the station on? Left hand side. Let's stand on the ladder on the right-hand side, because then they'd have a hard time viewing from the station platform. We got to Red Path and they stopped for water. There was a road going to the river, so we jumped off and sat down on the roadway down below.

Jim went down to the river. The engineer said he'd give us 3 short blasts, that meant they were ready to go and we'd better jump on. He went to the water edge and I sat in the middle. I had a stick in my hand and I was fiddling around like this on the ground. All of a sudden I saw a pair of boots. There was an RCMP. He caught me right there. He said, where's your friend? I said, what friend? He said, there was 2 of you on there. I said, well I don't know, I'm traveling alone. Jim turned around and started coming up. So he knew there was 2 of us. He took us up to the yard by the station. Told us to take our packsacks off and empty them. So we did. They found nothing. He said, how much money you got? I said, I have \$1.50 or something. I had about \$50 in my boot. I said about \$1.50, pulled it out. Jim, how much you have. He said, oh I got a dollar. So finally the Mountie said, I want you guys to get the hell out of here. There's no accommodation here or nothing. Get to Jasper. Buy your ticket to Jasper, otherwise you're not supposed to be on CNR property unless you have a ticket. I want you to get tickets to Jasper and once you get there, I don't care what you do, as long as you get the hell out of here. I said, how we going to buy it with that kind of money?

What's the fare? So, he told us what the fare was, probably double what we had. I said, we don't have that kind of money. He said, I don't care, when that train comes through at 1:15, I want you at the station, I want you to have a ticket, and I want you guys to board that train. So, he left us. We went back to where we were, to that little store that was there where we got off. We got back there, but the freight train had left already. We had something to eat. I said to Jim, well I guess we could dig our money out and get our tickets and wait for that train. In the meantime, we had something to eat. We got our money out, went into the store, bought ourselves some food. Then went to the railway station, bought our tickets, went back and sat at the store. There was a pile of ties there, we sat on ties waiting for this passenger train to come. All of a sudden, we saw a Mountie, about 15 minutes before the passenger train was to come in. I see a Mountie walking and I said to Jim, here comes a Mountie. He come along and, how are you guys doing? Ok. You got your tickets? Yep. Where to? Jasper. Ok, be at the station when the train comes in. The train got there, we were at the station. The train come in, we had our tickets and got on board. We sat on the side of the car next to the platform at the station. That's where the Mounties were standing. We sat there and when the train started pulling out we said, bye bye buddy. Got to Jasper and we had to buy a ticket for Edmonton. So that was our experience riding the freight, just to learn.

I was working in Salisbury here. In 1936, I think Aberhart got in. A Baker was MP, he served this area. He used to come out and meet with us. Peter then had a store there. I used to listen to him. Didn't pay much attention, except we picked up these Social Credit

buttons. In 1938 when I started with the government in the fall, I had to take 25% pay on scrip money. I was here when they paid by script money, 25%. But in order to make use of it properly, you had to buy Alberta made goods. I wish I'd have kept some. We had a lot of money saved, but I never saved that darned script money. You had to buy Alberta made goods. I was single, living with my cousin. So, whenever they went Saturday to buy groceries, I'd give them script money. So, they'd use script money to buy groceries. I wouldn't buy groceries as a single guy. I didn't need it. So, I'd give it to them, they'd buy what they needed in Alberta made goods. That's the way I spent my script money. I never saved it. I always wondered why I didn't save some of it.

I got paid that way for a while. That's all I remember. As I say, politically I wasn't worried about it or even thought much of it. I was too young and was busy milking cows.

Oh, he probably was. I wasn't home then. I was working around Edmonton. He stayed on the farm. I'm sure he did. I remember, I forget who the member of parliament was for Leduc. He became quite a friend of dad's. Every time I went to see dad, he'd always brag about this guy, what favors he was doing him. He must have been participating. He was a Social Creditor anyway.

Other Albertans came in from the same unit. Charlie Hallet from Tofield, he came with me the same time and ended up in Strathcona that night and got off. But I don't remember anybody coming to pick him up.

It was in April '46. They let you roam around and travel, but you had to keep your uniform. I went to Vancouver to visit my sisters and all over. In April I got called to go to Calgary. That's when I got discharged, and I got to put my suit and clothes on.

Shortly thereafter I stayed at my cousin's place on the south side. One evening I thought, I've got to go down to the old Strathcona Hotel where we used to go as kids and drink. Sneak beer, guys that were older than me, used to hide the glass of beer under their coat. Take it off the table, because the table's always full of glasses. I'd sit in the car waiting and they'd give me the beer. So, I went down there to see who was available, if they were still coming to that hotel or not, some of my old acquaintances. Went in and sat on the east side against the wall, street. Thought I'd stay out of the way, the place was kind of full. Ordered my beer and I'm sitting there sipping away and looking around, sizing the crowd up a bit.

All of a sudden, a guy comes around the corner, he's going to the washroom. He happened to be a guy that I worked with when I was with the government, Bert Griswold. He stopped and talked to me and was surprised. He was happy to see me back. He said, you ready to go to work? Dominion Bridge will need some men, for working on that St. Joe's hospital project. We're just starting the load the steel and he's going to be hiring. Approach him and see. I'm sure you'll get a job, because he's going to need men. I said, Bert I don't know after 4 years if I can handle work in steel. He said, we'll be ? weekend. I said, I'll see. He got back and went down to sit with them guys, and I watched where he

sat. A bunch of guys sat there, another guy I knew, Slim McCall. He's a first world war veteran and boy, if he didn't join the army he'd kill you. He was there.

Another guy was Hambug Hat. That was Howard Huff, a big wheel for the Dominion Bridge, in charge of the job. So all of a sudden he comes to my table and says, I hear you're an iron worker. I said, well I was, I don't know if I am now. He said, but you worked at iron work. Yes. He said, what kind of guns you use. I said, Ingersol. He said, I can use somebody like you. Can you start on Monday? This was about Wednesday. I said, well I guess I can, I'll have to get some clothes and get ready. He said, you go home, get your unemployment insurance book, and you come and see me at the end of project on site where we're putting up this hospital.

He said, you probably don't know anything about UI books because you never used them before the war. Told me where the office was located on 102nd avenue there. He said, you go pick it up, you come back and deposit your book, and away you go. So, I said ok. I went, got my book at the curling rink on the south side where they were loading steel, across to the high-level bridge. So, I put to work turning the old crab on the derrick, unloading the steel out of the car, putting it on trucks so they could haul it to the site. Got that done and they started erecting. I was involved in erection, sent up steel. He had a guy from Calgary there as a foreman, Wolleen. We did very well. I got to know the guy a little bit and he got to know me. Steelworkers came along and they wanted to join the union. Dominion Bridge was under the Steelworkers in Winnipeg. In Calgary they were under Mine Mill Smelter Workers. I had to pay dues to the Steelworkers that month. It was very cheap anyway. The legion come along and I gave them \$5 or something for legion card. All set. So, I worked away. Finally, the chief for Dominion Bridge come along one afternoon. I knew they thought I was doing ok. He said, we're getting riveting equipment coming in here in the next day or two. I'm putting Slim McCall in charge. I worked with Slim for the government. So, they put Slim in charge of the riveting. He told me I should send you; he wants you on his crew. I said, oh that's good. So I started riveting, I got on the crew again. So, we riveted, the job got done. They wanted me to go to Winnipeg and then go north on some big bridge job in Manitoba. They were from Winnipeg, this branch of Dominion Bridge. I said, no, I've just come back home, I don't want to go back in the woods. I wanted to stay around here and get acquainted a little bit, visit my relatives. Howard said, when you're ready, pack your suitcase and come down to Winnipeg and tell them at the office that I want you up on the job there. I said ok. I said, I don't think I'll do that. This guy from Calgary was running the Calgary department and he worked as a foreman for this guy. Hal said to me, we'll be having some work in the spring breakup in Calgary, so you come to Calgary. I said, I might do that. He said, what are you going to do now? I said, I'll look around, probably do something. I suppose you're going go back for the government. I said, could be. That's what I did, I went back for the government.

As a bridgeman. They called you a bridgeman. I was with the government, we just moved into Coronation. We were going to put a steel bridge that winter across the big river. I got a letter from a guy by the name of Merle Baker. I didn't know who he was, but anyway he wrote me a letter and said he needed some iron workers. He had taken this job as

superintendent in the building of the Imperial Oil refinery that was coming in from Whitehorse. He needed some foreman material. So, he thought if I come and he'd check me out and if I was OK, he'd make me a foreman. Not a foreman, because they didn't call them foremen in those days. They call you a leader or a pusher. The foreman that I was working for the government was a very good friend of mine, at least we'd become good friends. I showed him the letter. I said here Dick, you look at that letter. He read it and said, what are you going to do? I said, I don't know. I don't know the man, I have no idea. We talked and he said, look, you know what you're getting here. I don't know what they're going to pay you there. Why don't you go ahead and try it? If you don't like it, you come back here. He said, give it a try, find out what's going on. So him and I went on a toot for a couple of days in Coronation in the hotel there. Drank and stayed in the hotel and ate in the hotel. The guy that owned the hotel was a neighbor of ours from Calmar. We're were having a hell of a good time. Finally, on Sunday I decided to catch a bus going to Edmonton to see what the job was all about. Went into the hotel and he was making time out. A wooden dresser, wooden box he had there as a briefcase. So I'm sitting on the bed having my beer. ? was getting pretty close. I said, for god's sake Dick, what are you doing? You've been there for an hour. Is that how long you're going to take in a day to make up a time sheet for me? He said, somebody's got to pay for our beer and our stay here. He said, I'll be done in a couple of minutes. I said, the bus is going to come, I've got to go. So, he said, ok Steven, sign the sheets. I'm signing and I see one, two, three, four, what the hell's going on here? So I said ok, caught the bus, come to the city. WM Barns was the prime contractor from California doing his job at Imperial. I got sent to the office. Everything's there. My name is up on the board, my number is 830, and I'm ready to go to work. I went to work.

That started when the oil boom hit here. I told you I had that letter and was to come here and go to work. We were still non-union. While we're here working, we got into trouble with the carpenters. The superintendents were non-union. We started building a timber platform for valves coming in from Whitehorse. The carpenters caught him and they squealed to the project superintendent. Went after him and they bawled him out. I'm erecting steel on the powerhouse. I'm supposed to be the pusher or leader in charge of the crew. He come over... threw his cap on the floor in my shack. What the hell's wrong Merle? He said, I just caught hell. He told me the story about being run off by the carpenters. He said, we should join a union. We should have a union.

He asked, have you ever been in a union? I said yep. I was one month with the Pulp Sulphide Paper Makers in BC, because I worked for Port Mill Pulp. We organized down there and we got fired, the whole works of us, about a month later when they found out we were in the union. We got let go. Just loaded on the ship and you get the hell out of Port. So I said, I had one month experience. Next one, I come back from overseas and joined Steelworkers from Winnipeg. That's who represented Dominion Bridge employees. I was in the union as long as my first month's dues lasted, because the job was only good one month after I joined. So, it didn't last very long and I went back to

work for the government. At the government you don't need any union, or you don't have any anyway. So, I had a month at each one. He said, I haven't had any experience, so why don't you go ahead and try to see if we can get one going? I said, well I don't know. You had to punch in and out on the jobsite. He says, when you decide to go, let me know, and I'll take over your job and look after it for you. If you don't get back at quitting time, I'll punch you out so they won't know.

I said ok. So, one day I decided to go in and see. I took the time off, sneaked out of the project, went to the city. Went to see the labor department. I happened to run into Ken Pugh. I told him what we were after. He said, the only advice I can give you, we can't do nothing for you here, but I'll give you a name you can contact. His name is Carl Berg, and he's the western vice president for Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. He'll tell you how to get in. So, I went to see Carl and I told him the story. He said, how many men you got there? I said about 20. He said, fill in the applications and I'll send my assistant George Richardson tomorrow and he'll pick them up and we'll go at it. So, I went back the next day and had the guys sign the applications. George picked them up. Application form for membership and a charter for us. Carl didn't know ironworkers from a bale of hay. The company found out.

In the meantime, the other brothers had negotiated with Bill Berezowski, the Communist Mine, Mill, Smelter guy. Just recent settlement 13.5 cents or something. As soon as the company found out we formed a union. We weren't worried about it, because they were already recognized unions. All of a sudden one morning here we are, the guys getting \$1.25, the wages went up to \$1.37.5. He still laughs and says, I was only a kid, 16 years old, so I didn't get the extra half cent. He just told me that last week. Anyway, before we really got settled to being organized, we already got a increase of 13.5 cents. Good thing to join the union, everybody gets a raise right away. Everybody was enthused. So we had our first meeting and I was selected to be the secretary. Carl was the one to conduct the meetings, big wheel. So, we got along and finally we got the charter on July 7th, 1948. It was local 132. These guys stuck with me all the way through. In the fall that winter the job finished in '49. I had to stay with another fellow for 6 weeks to take the bugs out. We had a meeting in March.

In the meantime, I was going to the council meeting. As secretary I thought I'll be active and join the council. The Labour Council; the building trades weren't there. So I learned a little bit from them. Jack Craig from the carpenters, that's the ones who squawked. Then another business agent Cliff Beestly. I looked at my membership book from this Trades and Labour Congress Charter thing. It said Steelworkers. I thought that's funny, that's not a common construction industry. But I didn't know much about steelworkers either at that time. Didn't know about any of them. I thought, that's not right. I told somebody, and they told me that steelworkers were another organization belonging to CIO and they were an industrial union. Well you're in the wrong union if you're in construction. We have our annual meeting and Steve gets up and makes a motion that we switch. We apply to charter to the international union of association with ironworkers. A proper union, because we're told that that's where we should go. The motion passed.

Anything I said at that meeting, all the guys followed. Carl started weaving his head and saying, oh I'm going to pay my dues.

I said well Carl I can't help it. That's the one we were told we should to go. But he did argue. He got hold of ? Cook, the business rep for the Ironworkers in Vancouver, local 97. Cook got a hold of the general organizer. Both of them came up and had a meeting. I had to sign again. We got an application to sign about 10 guys to get the charter. George, being international rep, he said to me, have you got any money left from your organization? I said ya, we have a few dollars left. He said, the international will probably want that money turned over to them. I said, George, they'll never get that money. We may as well go home if that's what you want.

I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm planning on using that money to pay initiation fees for the members at local 720, which is your local international charter. He conceded. So, I went ahead and paid initiation fees for the guys that were available in 312 to join 720, which is international union. So, we got the charter on July 6th, 1949. We had an Ironworkers' Union then. So that was it. 720 was established. We had about 20 guys. No jobs till the Devon plant started; that was 6 months later. In the meantime, I went to work for Dominion Bridge on Victoria High School. That's where they were building then, and the General Hospital. But anyway, the first outfit I approached was Atlas Construction. They were just a small outfit, doing a little work for WC Carry. Dominion Bridge was the big wheel. They came from Winnipeg to do jobs here, or came from Calgary to do the steel work here. When they finished the job, they'd go back and you didn't have a job. So Atlas was a small outfit around here.

I went to see Bruce McLean. Bruce and Walter Cleavley were the owners. I found out that Bruce was a station engineer at the powerhouse, so he was Operators' union. I got talking to Bruce. I signed a few guys in and went to see Bruce. We got an agreement drafted up and I handed it to him. He read it over and signed it. First agreement with a little local guy. And Dominion Bridge was a great big wheel sitting on the outside. So Bruce signed it no problem, so we had an agreement. We worked on that agreement. Dominion Bridge come from Winnipeg to do the Low-Level Bridge, they were paying Winnipeg rates of steelworkers. I found out what the hell they were and went to the board. I went to the city. Black was in, he was a bricklayer. I went to see the board of industrial relations, and they ruled in our favor that Dominion Bridge had to pay our wages, not the Winnipeg rates. They were to comply with Alberta local rates. So they had to drop their rates from Winnipeg. They weren't going far out, because our rates were the same as Dominion Bridge in Calgary. So, they had to pay that. They were a little hostile about that. We started with about 20 members and kept fooling around. We had no money. I was able to scrape up from dues so I could pay myself \$30 a week. The international subsidized for \$50 a week, so I got \$80 a week.

But I had to make a weekly report. If I didn't make a weekly report, I didn't get paid. I sometimes sent one report that covered two weeks. They soon stopped that on me. I found it useless, because some weeks you had nothing. Next week you might have an

event or two, so you report on that. So, I'd just wait for the 2nd week. But anyway, they subsidized the local, directly payable to me. So, I was kind of an international representative for them for a while. That worked for about 10 or 12 years. When it grew they decided that was it. So, they cut it off. From there on in we've been on our own. I was there a total of 25 years, I guess. 21 and then for 4 years, '70 to '74, I was appointed by the trustees, because I had established a pension plan and a health and welfare plan, and a partnership in the meantime.

So, they had a board of trustees which was comprised of 4 contributing employers. The employers contributed 10 cents to the pension plan over and above your wages. They didn't deduct your wages, but. What I used to do, I learned that from the Americans when I was at conventions, that's what they did. They'd settle a monetary package, say 25 cents. Then they'd say, well our members want 10 cents to go into a pension plan for them out of that 25. That way they get 15, and 10 went into a pension plan. Which is alright for them, because they don't have to pay income tax on that. But most guys didn't like it. But anyway, I got it in, in a big vote one night at a meeting. ... no, no they wanted to drink their beer. Today they're happy. Pension plan, health and welfare plan, apprenticeship plan. That was all established before I left. As I said, '70 when the pension plan was put into effect. I waited a couple of years. We had to have a couple of years of income in order to establish something worthwhile to pay a guy. Now? Gosh I don't know. They've got 800 members working on the 3 plants in Ft. McMurray. I don't know what's working here, they must have about 1,100 or more. When I was there, the best we ever had was 600. When we did the Dew Line we had about 600. The Dew Line was going and the pulp mill was going. So, we had some people come in from the coast and other locals to help you out. So, we never built very much. But now when Ft. McMurray opened up, we come in pretty heavy.

That wasn't the only thing. What our local 720 didn't know, most of them don't except those that were in 132 the first local. Second one I organized that ?? and I was business agent. I had to get a third one going, local 776. That was for the shops. They were fabricating steel, small shops mainly. They were coming out on the outside doing the work, the main bridges and that they're paying union wages, and these guys were not. They didn't have a union. So, they used to come in there and fabricate handrails and come in on the outside of the overpass and start putting that stuff in iron, as it's known. Some they hollered at me, never mind our own members going after me; don't let these guys come out on the outside and bid on this work that we're supposed to be doing. So I had to go after them. I'll tell you, it was a job. I used to work for 720 during the day, go home and have something to eat, then I'd go out and start visiting these guys who worked at the shops. The way I used to catch them was at 5 o'clock quitting time I'd have one end of the lane, have another guy standing at the other end of the lane. As the cars were coming out, take their license plate numbers. Next time I'd go to the highways dispatch and pay 25 cents a copy and I'd get owner's names, telephone numbers, and addresses.

Now? Just one; Local 312 was dissolved when we got 720 in. 776 was dissolved 40 years later, just 2 years ago. The reason being, the energy agreement that was signed between

Lougheed and Mr. Trudeau, and work cut out all over the place. There was no construction. Oil people shut down, there was no building going on. Some of these contractors we had agreements with left the city. EM Steel went back to Vancouver. Great West Steel has gone out and the local was left with nothing. Carry didn't do anything much anymore, and Dominion Bridge was out of business. So, the new ones that started are automatically our shops. We did have a local here, 776 got taken away. Membership was transferred to Calgary local 801. They joined 801, over here by the refinery. Wayward Steel. They're also Ironworkers Union there. Those are 2 new steel companies. But good people of them. Especially Supreme Steel. You couldn't work for a better employer. Everybody was looked after properly and well paid.

In Regina, Local 771 is the outside local union. All the ironworker locals across Canada separately are the shop, that's another division. They're still ironworkers but they have different conditions, rates, and everything. Different classification of people. But the outside erection people, as far as health and welfare goes, they have an agreement that if you leave this local and go there, your credits go to that local.

I was at the meeting of CIO when they merged. I remember Wilson. Quite a lady. Another fellow working for the Canadian Labour Congress was Jim Shewchuk. I know he's dead. They have a foundation. Norm was there. Peter, the fat fellow that worked in the packing plants - Henry Tomaschuk.

I was there, but I didn't last very long. I got involved at the Legion so much at that time. That's where most of my work was to be carried out there. I couldn't spare the time. NDP, you know how they operate. Right now, everything's quiet. Possibility of an election coming up, then they start coming around and checking you for membership. So, it's pretty still, there isn't much activity. When I was there, we had some stuff going at a picnic deal west of Nisku. The picnic grounds there, we had a do in there one time for them. Mrs. Tomaschuk, she had a few things going. I participated when I could. But I had to drop this business of president. There wasn't enough activity for me to ...

I always have been. Except this last year or two since I've got these problems going, I haven't bothered. I know they're probably looking for membership now. But I found something funny. Any time I used to donate \$100, both federal and provincial. I found out last time we had them, we had ... a pilot. Bell Hughes, the bugger, he didn't have his dues paid up and he was working with the party there, yet he hadn't paid any money into it. I said how the hell do these guys get in without having any money in there. That surprised me. I thought that everybody that participated and everybody that was active during election would have a membership. You don't have to have membership to vote for them, but ... Then besides, where do you get your information unless you go to their meetings? That's my pledge, I still go out and ... Big signs put up here. Still got the pictures downstairs, the time I was involved with the city. That's when we started EVA, Edmonton Voter Association.

I never dreamed I'd ever be a labor representative. I thought when I left school I'd like to find something I liked. I didn't find anything, but this labor representation was all

accidental when we started talking unions. I guess I opened my mouth too much, and that's how I got caught. But I enjoyed it. I put in lots of 20-hour days traveling from Cold Lake to Hinton, because they had trouble there and trouble here. All one night you'd travel through from one place to the other. When I think of it all, it was a lot of work, a lot of grief. But it's gone. And I enjoyed it. I'd go do that work again any time.

Some of them even called me in the last two years about the health and welfare plan, or pension because her husband was killed or passed away and she didn't get anything. How come? Well, I'm not on the board so I don't know. It's 25 years since I worked there through the union. I worked 5 years as labor relations for Great West Steel.

As a whole, I enjoyed the work. Even though it was miserable and terrible. I was always set that when I started a local, I wasn't going to leave it. I was going to stay with, hell or high water. I had lots of opportunities. I had 3 opportunities to go with labor relations, one for Bechtel, 2 for Floor. But I didn't go with them. I said, I've got a job to do here, I want to finish it. I started it; I want to make sure it's successful. And it has been successful. I read that story. I'm sorry I gave that story to my daughter to run off on the computer, so I could have copies. I was going to let you read it. It gives you quite a bit of story on that local.

I'll pass it around, make sure people get the background. It's a good story. It's a true one. Shows you a lot of progress was made. I was there for 25 years. We never had a strike, and I don't think they ever had a strike. Always been able to settle with Dominion Bridge and those. Sometimes took a little bit of BS. I did some kidding with them and beat them to the punch a couple of times. Lots of times when we couldn't quite reach a settlement, we'd go ahead and take a strike vote. Just to have a strike vote available. But you couldn't take strike action unless you got permission from headquarters. They had to give you the ok. But when I called for a strike vote I'd tell the headquarters to give me permission. I said I wasn't going to use it, but I wanted it, in case I had to. The last one did it all. We had people working in Saskatchewan... And Dominion Bridge wanted this vote taken on employees working in Saskatchewan and the Territories, outside Alberta jurisdiction. We didn't have to allow them to do that. They had to be confined to labor in Alberta. The board asked me, I said let them go ahead, I don't care. So they did. They both came out, I heard..., 98% voted for strike vote. That soon convinced them. That's all we did. We never had a strike. But I always made sure we had a big vote. I never certified a company, unless I had 75 or more. Never that 51, that wouldn't work with me. That was too damn close, it wasn't honest. If you got only 51, what are you going to do with the other 49 that's opposed to you? Your membership or local is just as good as your weakest member. That's it.

I even sat on a jurisdiction board here a couple weeks ago. They asked me to sit in for the chairman of the board, make a ruling. I went down there, told my story, and won the case. After all these years. But that's it.

It wasn't at the international level. It was here on the labor council level. I didn't go to the big deal, because you had to be a delegate. I guess it came about by arrangements at a higher level. All they had to do was had it fed down, and each council had a right to vote. I was at the labor temple office when we had that meeting and it was voted on. In fact, I just gave my pictures away to the local for a history record, a picture of all of us at this convention. Just a matter of knowing what it was all about. It was all labor anyway. All they had to do was use some common sense. I don't care whether your AFL or CIO. CIO had its and AFL has its face. One's industrial, one's another craft. But they're all the same, excepting... The employer says, how come you guys differ? I said, well because the CIO is a politically oriented group. We don't believe in politics. Grouping up for politics. But you did that without... I'd say, no we don't participate in politics, we vote as we please. I know that Grant Notley used to come down to the office. The first time he shows up I said, we just let our people vote. I brought it up at the meetings but the guys wouldn't go for it. They said, we'll vote as we please. I just said, I thought I'd mention to you, if you want to do it that way, fine. But I know where I am, and you know where I am too. Period. It was all done on international level. Then it feeds downward and you get it locally ... Here comes the cook.