

Stefan Melnychuk

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Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Melnychuk residence
With daughter Janice Melnychuk

SM: When I went to school I was Steven in the school board, but in the school itself I was Steve.

JM: He was born on January 6th, 1924 so he is 93 years young and heading on to 94. We're here at Beverly Lodge in Beverly, room 326, 4410 – 117 Avenue, where he has lived. He lived in Porta Place for seven years and he's been here about two and a half.

SM: I've been altogether 11 years.

JM: At this lodge, but before that when he came to Alberta he lived in Beverly. So he has lived here probably 70ish years.

Q: Tell me about your background.

SM: Both of my parents were born in Bukovyna. My dad was a smart kid. There was a Jew that built furniture and he saw this and said, you come to work for me half a day and I'll pay for your school. So he did that. It turned out that he became a pretty good cabinetmaker. He read books and he knew what was going on in the world and he could see the First World War on its way. So, he says, I'm not staying here. He's spent two years in the army, which was compulsory. People were coming to Canada because they opened immigration in 1895 or around that, and this 1908 he decided to go to Canada. So, he gathered up what money he could and he went.

JM: Wasn't he married?

SM: Oh yes, they were married and they had a little boy named John and mom was pregnant with the second child. So, he left and went to Canada. I really don't know where he landed, but he worked. I guess he landed in Ontario because he worked on the railroads out there. It was so isolated once he went to work, he couldn't get out of there.

Q: He came with his family?

SM: No, he came over in 1908 and my mother came in 1912. During that time when they were separated, the little girl that was born. She lived about two months and died of pneumonia. The boy, he was playing with his uncle, he was two years old and his uncle was two years old. They were playing together and his uncle hit him over the head with a hammer and he never lived.

JM: So, they had two children in the old country but no children when they arrived.

SM: Then he worked here and there and ended up in a coalmine in Coleman, Alberta. But he didn't work in the mine as a miner, he worked on the track that goes into the mine. He worked on the railway track. He didn't smoke when he came over here, but when he got to work the other guys that were working there smoked. So my dad goes and buys himself a pack of tobacco and papers and says to the boys, when I give you a signal, we're going to stop for a smoke.

Q: Organizing already?

MS: And my mom was a good organizer too. But anyway, next day the foreman came and asked, what's going on here? He could see everyone was sitting down smoking, but he couldn't do anything. So, from then on they had smoke breaks. Then time went by – one year, two years. So, he wrote to mom. Mom had a loom, her and her sister-in-law had a loom and they were making cloth and selling it to the Jews to make money. There's a sample right there.

JM: That's an artifact of my grandmother's. This is her cloth. They had this in the old country, and when dad went to visit, they gave him a piece of her loom cloth. Hand-made.

MS: She was doing so well that she didn't want to go to Canada. So, he wrote to her, because I got this from my uncle when I was there in 1978. He was telling me that she got a letter from him and he says, either you're coming to Canada or else not. If you want, I'll get somebody else here and you get yourself somebody there. So, she decided to come. She got on the boat in Frankfurt, Germany and she was on that boat for three weeks coming to Canada and landed in Quebec City.

JM: So, dad has told me this story - and I would put this in early here - is that my grandmother came from a family of 12. She was among the oldest. She was very good with the children, so she never went to school. She was never able to go to school, while my grandfather did go to school. She never did learn to read and write and she was totally self-taught in everything that she did. The handicrafts that she did and what she was able to learn in Ukraine, she brought to Canada. She was a trained midwife.

Q: This is his mother?

JM: Yes, dad's mother. So, I wanted to put that in early because she was really a babysitter, and didn't have schooling in the old country.

Q: The job of midwife was very important.

SM: That's what astonished me, is she couldn't read or write and yet she could do these other jobs.

Q: She couldn't read or write in either Ukrainian or English?

SM: I'll come to that a little bit later. Besides that, I lived with her until I was 15 years old and she died. Anyway, she did the cooking. Anything you could think of, even medicines and stuff. What do call it when you sterilize stuff - all that she somehow knew. So there she was coming to Canada. She got on the train for Quebec and then a whole week to Coleman. Dad had established a little bit of money already, so when she came down, they right away turned around and bought a little house for something like \$300. Mom was a good cook too. The house was too small for a boarding house, so she used it as a restaurant. There were lots of guys there working; they came over from Europe and their wives were back there. They would come and eat at noon and at suppertime, then on the weekends too, Sundays and all.

Q: These were miners and single men?

SM: Yes, miners there, all single men. So, I guess she made some money and did pretty good. Anyway, she kept after my dad to teach her to read and write. You know how that works, the husband trying to teach his wife to drive a car or something. He wouldn't do it. But there was one miner there, he says to her, I'll teach you. Even at that, when she came to Canada she was 26 years old; it was hard to start from scratch. By the time she died she used to write to her mother and back. That's really something, the desire she had.

Q: Did she write in English or Ukrainian?

SM: Ukrainian.

Q: Around the home, was the language Ukrainian?

SM: Yes, but she picked up a little English too. She was very sharp.

Q: What about you. When you were born and what language did you speak?

SM: My first language was Ukrainian. Then when I went to school I started to learn English. I went through with English all through life and now I've started to go back to Ukrainian.

Q: So back to where we were; your parents are still in Coleman?

SM: They're still in Coleman. The war started in 1914; she came in 1912 and the war started in 1914. The coal mine was losing their contracts and they were losing men too, going to war and all of that. So, they were going to shut down the mine, but not suddenly. So they started laying off all the single guys. My dad happened to have a friend, a single guy by the name of George Tkachuk. He got laid off. Why he went to Manitoba I have no idea - well he might've had some relatives there. Anyway, so he went to Manitoba and my dad worked for another year because he was married. After that year was up, they moved. The way they used to handle it then is that you ordered a boxcar. You loaded all your stuff in the boxcar. They even took wood and all kinds of stuff. So, George went to a place called Cowan, Manitoba.

JM: Near Swan River.

SM: I have a history book on Cowan that you'll have to have a look at. So, he went over there and took a homestead. But he was alone. He wasn't a very hardworking guy. So they come to Cowan, because where else are they going to go? They don't know anybody else. I don't know why they didn't go to Peace River, but they went to Cowan and took a homestead.

JM: Who, your mom and dad?

SM: Yes. Dad was a carpenter, so he put up a house right away, a mud house with a lean-to for a cow and all that. He was doing a lot of carpentry work all over the place. He traveled all the way south of Winnipeg and places like that, and mom would be left alone. By this time they had a little girl, Victoria. So that was fine. In the wintertime they got some heavy snow. They looked in the basement and it didn't look very good because they built a house in a low spot and it flooded. So they lost a lot of stuff. They packed up and went to George Tkachuk and he said, you know what, I'll never get title for this myself. You help me get the title and I'm going to sign over half of it to you, half of the quarter section. So, they went there and they lived with him for seven years. Their second baby was born, a boy, and in 1922 they moved into their own house. They built another house on what he signed over. So, then they parted, but they were still always good friends.

JM: Really close; the houses were close.

SM: Yes, it was close. They knew each other really well. George Tkachuk was in the army in the old country - in the medical corps. He was sort of like a nurse. He was a guy that used to talk about microbes and stuff like that. George Tkachuk was a pretty strong guy too. He could do stuff with his hands and build things. He used to raise bees and we got our honey from him. Anyway, they moved into the house and shortly after that their third child was born. The name was Paul. That was April 16, 1922. But we didn't see much of our dad because he was away working all the time. We did see him and I remember in the spring, he'd get a haircut right down to the bone to make sure and get rid of all the lice. We went on, and on the farm, you grow fast. When you're six or seven years old, you've got a job feeding the chickens or something, picking eggs and any kind of work. You had to do it. In 1928 my oldest sister was 16 years old and she got married, so that was tough for a mother to take. Her oldest child was gone. We had blueberry country over there, so we had blueberries and all that. The municipality that we lived in, you used to be able to go and work at *sheveruk* every year. You'd go and work for two days without pay but it goes on your taxes; you reduce your taxes. That's a Ukrainian word; there's an English word for it. So, everything went by as ever. But this one year, and in 1929 there was a big revolution in Winnipeg.

Q: The Winnipeg General Strike? That was 1919 but there were other strikes too.

SM: When the stock market went down in 1929, dad was home and this was August. Dad was home for a while, and he went to do his 'sheveruk.' Mom wanted to pick one more bucket of berries. The oldest one left was Bill and then Paul and me and my sister Rose. She was three and a half years old and I was five, Paul was seven and Bill was ten. Bill and Paul used to play with a rifle, and dad didn't know about it. He had the rifle loaded because the chickens were running loose and a hawk would come, and he had it hung up under the eaves of the house. It was drizzling that day so he took the gun inside, loaded and all. Paul, the younger of the two, well we had a house and then we had a little kitchen on the side. I was over in the kitchen there and the other three were over in the other house. Little Rosie comes, I heard a bang. She comes over and says, Paul shot Bill. I went over to the house and he's face down and blood bubbling out of his nose. He got it right through the heart. He was ten years old and the other guy was seven years old.

Q: So the older one shot the younger one?

SM: No, the younger one. I heard a story like this about a year ago or so, exactly, a seven year old and a ten year old. So, I stayed in there somehow or other, and people started coming in. Dad come in, he jumped off the horses and they tried to go inside the barn. Dad went to the house right there and I saw him. My dad walked in. He took one look over there. Paul was going up the ladder to go hide in the attic. My dad realized that he did wrong but he knew that he had no chance with him anymore. So, he went up and grabbed him and hugged him. What presence of mind he had!

JM: This is an important story because it impacts the rest of their life.

SM: A year and a half later, my dad died of a ruptured appendix.

Q: How old was he?

SM: He was 49.

JM: It's almost like he died of a broken heart. He had appendicitis and he knew it, and he literally would not go to the hospital.

SM: He built himself a block and it would hold it in. He'd get by, and keep working and everything. But when it really got bad, he had to go to the hospital. The closest place was Swan River 30 miles away, and it was just a little wee town at that time.

Q: But they had a hospital there.

SM: And a doctor. The neighbour had an old Model T. This was December, somewhere around Christmastime. He drove out there and when my dad stepped off the truck, he could feel that appendix bust, and poison went through. He died on the 7th of January, 1931. It was the day after

my birthday. I turned seven on the 6th and he died on the 7th, one day later. So, I was seven years old when he died. My mother took it really bad. She's stuck with these children and she didn't speak English at all really. This got her so bad that she had a nervous breakdown, and she would spend a month at a time in the hospital. So, one of the neighbours would come over and look after us.

Q: The neighbour came to live with you?

SM: Yes, she'd come to live with us for the time that mom was away. The neighbour was a young woman that had married a miner in Gods Lake, Manitoba. She married him, she got pregnant, and he died of cancer, all inside of half a year. So, she'd come over and was living with her sister, and she had the baby, a little girl. She was the one that would come over, because who else could you get? Then there was another family there, and one of the sisters came in and looked after us. She was a very nice lady. December came and mother was still in the hospital, and we had this girl - her name was Jean. We had to go to school. I was in grade 2 and Paul was going to grade 3.

Q: In Swan River?

SM: No in Cowan. You had to have a scribbler and a pencil to go to school, even at that grade. We had no money, no money at all. This Jean had 10 cents. She went to the store, and she bought us a scribbler and a pencil. She cut the pencil in half and cut the scribbler in half. It seemed like a story but this is true; it's exactly what happened. So, they sent us to school. I can't remember who got the eraser. So, I'm going to school and by this time, I'm already speaking English, I'm in grade 2 already. We lived three quarters of a mile from the school, so it was okay.

JM: How far from town?

SM: Two miles.

Q: And the school is a one-room school?

SM: One-room school, from beginners to grade 8. You could go to grade 9 by correspondence, and there were a couple that did that. But we couldn't afford it because it cost money. We went to school there and I wasn't doing too great or too bad until I reached about grade 4. I started to smarten up and everything started to come together for me. My brother finished grade 8; he was one grade ahead of me, and then I came and got a certificate that I was promoted to grade 9. I didn't have to write any exams. But I can understand that. You've got almost 50 kids in the school with one teacher. My average at Christmas and Easter – because you'd write the exams at Christmas and Easter – was over 90. What's the sense of keeping me in the grade, because I'd get the same on the next one. I was always very good in four subjects – I'd get 100 percent.

Q: Which subjects?

SM: Math, Grammar, Spelling and Music – that'd be 100 percent. Everything opened up to me.

Q: Did you have any kind of community life?

SM: That's another little side story. We had no hall; there was no such place. But my mother being what she was said, you know, we got to have a hall here. So, she got the women together, and they started having box socials. They wanted my dad to get in on it, but he didn't want to be the organizer. Mom said she'd do it. Once they got some money and got a piece of land that was donated, my dad got involved. Him being a carpenter, he went in there and did it. It was all volunteer work, and they built a hall. My dad had knowledge of these. They wanted insurance on the hall, but to have insurance for a group of people was hard to get. So, they had four trustees, and my dad was one of the trustees. It stayed that way until 1941, when they decided to change that, and all us children had to sign off on that.

Q: Was it a labour temple?

SM: National Hall. There was something else I was going to tell you but... we all had to sign off on that thing.

JM: The period between when your dad died and your mom died, you and your brother became the men of the house.

Q: Talk about how you ran the farm and the home as a boy.

SM: All of a sudden, your mother's sick and she's in the hospital. So, we started taking charge. We were a year and nine months apart, but I'm growing faster than my brother, so we were just like twins. Because I was his size, I was expected to do the same work. And I did the same work. I was more aggressive than him too; he was a little on the lazy side. We had to supply wood for the stove, we had to feed the cow, water the cow, clean the barns – everything that a man would have to do, we had to do.

JM: Their mother worked out a contract that they would get wood for the school.

SM: No, that's a different story. We had hay in stacks. You had a hay knife, you had to cut the stack. It's a knife with three little blades in it. But we're only kids, we haven't got the weight for that job. When an adult came over, we said, we've got a job for you.

Q: What kind of farm were you running? You had 80 acres, right?

SM: We had 80 acres.

Q: Was there any grain, or was it all cattle?

SM: We had grain – some hay and some grain. In the top drawer over there there's, that metal box. In it, there's a little black book. So, it was hard. We were kids. You want to play yet, and you don't have time. You see other kids that don't have to do any work, but you had to work. So like Janice was saying, we were in school and I'd say I was about 11 and Paul would be 13. They had one of those long stoves that would take a full four-foot piece of wood for cordwood. But cordwood was always just a little too big and you couldn't close the door. So, they bought ten cords of wood, seasoned, and we cut them in half. They wanted to cut them in half and they couldn't get anybody to cut it in half. I don't know how it happened that my brother and I took on the job cutting ten cords of wood.

Q: You were cutting it with a saw?

SM: With a saw. We'd cut them in half and pile them on the woodpile. We'd do that during recess time and dinnertime when we'd get back from home, because we always went home for lunch to water the cattle and stuff. We cut those ten cords. Can you imagine kids that age taking on a contract like that?

Q: And meanwhile the other kids are playing.

SM: Yes. But some of the kids were saying, hey can I do that a little bit? But I remember just like today, we got a cheque \$2.50 for ten cords of wood, 25 cents a cord. No wonder they couldn't get anybody to do it.

Q: How did you handle the grain farming part of it?

SM: For the grain farming, always somebody else was helping. I don't know whether we had enough equipment. We had two horses when my dad was alive, but when he died, we had to sell the horses because there were debts to pay off and stuff. But we had a friend that had two horses. So, I did walk behind the plow quite a bit. Only two horses to pull it, but you wouldn't go too deep, and you walk up and down.

Q: What kind of soil was it up there?

SM: We had good black heavy soil.

JM: It's beautiful country. Big trees, lots of spruce trees.

SM: One thing about Manitoba; they have this Riding Mountain. Because they've got Riding Mountain there, our water level was really high because pressure from the top brings it up. So if you dig down nine feet, you get water. What was I going to say about that?

Q: Did you dig a well?

SM: Yes, there was one before, and dad dug it. I think the first well was about 20 feet deep. That one we dug was only about 12 feet. Oh there's something I left off. When my dad died, we had a hired man. That was 1929, when everybody was in the city looking for work. So the government of Canada, R.B. Bennett, Conservative government, they got scared; they were afraid the whole country would go. So, they come up with an idea. They were going to give the farmer \$5 and give the man \$5 to go to work. So, we had two men working before my dad died; he took on two men. But the farmer usually gave the money to the men. But there was nothing much for them to do. They did cut wood for us and stuff like that. But when dad died, we didn't have that. One man got left behind, and he stayed with us. Later on, he took a homestead and he had horses, so we used his horses. That's when we learned to handle horses. Like I say, we cut those ten cords by hand – we could handle an axe and everything just as good as anybody else.

Q: So you didn't have much time to engage in sports or Ukrainian dancing or anything like that.

SM: No, but every year we'd have a concert. Every school had concerts. They'd put a play on, recitations, and stuff like that. We always got picked for them. I got picked because I could read Ukrainian a bit.

Q: Were they teaching Ukrainian in the school too?

SM: Not during the daytime. But one year, 1935 I think it was, it was so cold outside that they shut the school down. But the Ukrainians would go there and heat up the stove, and the kids could go learn and they taught us a little Ukrainian. But I started by my mother teaching me the alphabet; she learned enough that she could teach me. This man on the left, he was from Ukraine but another part of Ukraine. My mom when she was young wanted a loom; she always wanted a loom. So my dad being a carpenter, he wouldn't build her one. Anyway, she talked this guy into building her a loom. We used to plant flax and make linen. I know how to do those things because my mom taught me how to get the linen out of the flax. It was a lot of work.

Q: This isn't linen, is it? (handling the sample)

SM: That's linen. That piece is over a hundred years old; it's from Ukraine. When I went to Ukraine in 1978, one of the cousins had this and she said, you know what, I'll cut it in half. She cut it in half and gave me half and she kept half.

Q: So, you learned how to treat the flax so it could be woven.

SM: Yes, the whole thing. We had a river about a mile from our place.

Q: Swan River.

SM: Yes, about a mile from our place. We'd take the flax over there and soak it in the water. Then you bring it out and dry it and then you mash it to get that linen out of it. It's a lot of work. What you end up with is very little obviously. But we planted it, and she showed us how they did in the old country; how we pull it out and shake it off. Then you make sheaves out of it. It's quite white. We would go and put that in the river and put rocks on it, it wasn't a fast river, and leave it there soaking for three or four days. Then you'd go back there, bring it out, put it up in the field and let it dry for a few days, then you'd take it home. It would be too heavy to carry when it was wet.

Q: Were there other families living close by?

SM: Yes, we had - there's a thing I'm going to throw in on that too. We had a neighbour one eighth of a mile away from us, the next farm over. Their name was, it should've been Olynik, but it was Lynik. But it should've been Olynik - oiler. Olynik means the guy making cooking oil. Anyway, they had a Massey Harris cream separator. We had no separator, we used to do it by putting the can into the well and the cream would settle on top. You'd drain off the milk and keep the cream and sell it.

Q: You were selling cream in cream cans?

SM: Yes. So, we had to milk the cows, us two boys, ten and twelve years old.

Q: How many cows did you have?

SM: We had altogether four cows, five once we had. So, we'd take that milk and carry it over there, separate it, take it back home, have breakfast and then go to school. Great childhood days! We'd do that twice a day because in the summertime they milk well. I was nine years old when I was milking cows. As a result, I was very strong in my hands. Look at how mine are. We did that every day. You knew it had to be done, and you did it. Then we'd have breakfast with porridge and milk and a little bit of cream.

Q: Then you had to make your lunch for school?

SM: No, we'd come home for lunch. At that age you run all the way. It would take you five minutes.

JM: He also told me that during the summer he had no shoes - bare feet all the time.

SM: Up to 12 years old, no shoes in the summertime. Step on a nail, pull it out, rusty nail and glass. You just hop on one foot for a while and then you're fine.

Q: You didn't treat it?

SM: Well sometimes it would fester and then you'd treat it. With my mother, she would soak it in water. It sucks it out, cleans it out, and then you put some stuff on there, at times a rag. They didn't have Band-Aids or anything. That was a good enough excuse that you didn't have to work. It was the excuse that was good enough that would keep you out of work.

JM: I always thought it was interesting how much work one did trying to get enough money to order stuff from a catalogue so you'd have boots for the winter for your kids.

SM: My mother did get a mother's allowance, but it was very small. Once a year in the fall, she got a cheque for about \$45 to buy shoes and coveralls and underwear and skits and mitts and socks for everybody. That's one thing the government did do.

Q: Was that already when the war was on?

SM: Oh no, that was before the war.

Q: They increased it during the war.

SM: Oh yes, but they had excuses – no money. When the war broke out, all of a sudden there was all kinds of money. Where was it hiding? Anyway, we used to make rag rugs for people. People would take rags and cut them into strips and my mom would get that linen thread in some colour and do the rag rugs. I got pretty good at it.

Q: This was during the Depression in the '30s, right?

SM: Yes, we're in the '30s.

Q: Do you remember the hard times in the community?

SM: Well it depended in the community too, you know. Anybody that wasn't afraid of work would have something. You wouldn't depend on cream, that's why you had mixed farming – pigs, chickens, some people had geese and turkeys, then the cows for the cream. That's how you got by. Money was very tight; 5 cents was big money. Popcorn - 5 cents a package for popcorn and you got a prize inside of it too. Do you remember they had a little tube about this long and this big around of popcorn for 1 cent? I'm a little older than you are. What about cigarettes, a five-pack of cigarettes, 5 cents. You could buy five cigarettes for 5 cents, ten cigarettes for 10 cents and 25 for 25 cents.

Q: During that time there was a lot of political division in the Ukrainian community. Was your community divided? Did people call each other political names?

SM: Absolutely. Even now I think about why some of those guys acted like capitalists. They were as poor as church mice and they thought they were capitalists. But I didn't know too much

about politics then. I did know that my parents were socialists, because they were thinking that the world wasn't run right. Why were there so many rich people and so many poor people.

Q: What about religion?

SM: They kind of hung onto their religion. My religion and my parents' religion was Orthodox. Then there'd be the Catholics, there'd be the Poles and people like that.

Q: Did that cause division in the community?

SM: Well in some ways. I still remember that if you were Catholic, you wouldn't marry a Protestant and stuff like that. Or if you were English, you wouldn't marry Ukrainian or vice versa. But as far as religion goes, there was only one church and it was east of town about 10 miles from our place. We had an Anglican come in to the school and Sunday school from Swan River. Of course, we were kids, so we'd go along with anything. Of course, you go there with 5 cents, you don't know whether you should give it or keep it. But the Anglicans, they did have the preachers come. It was a female preacher. In the wintertime, because over there it was all women, sisters, so they're busy knitting and all that. At Christmastime they might send you a scarf and a pair of mitts or something. So, it would keep you going.

Q: How long did you stay in Manitoba?

SM: I left there in 1940. I have a piece here of that year, 1939. I was 15 years old in January.

JM: I think there's a story when your dad was still alive, when the people of the community came to him and asked him to organize something. Your dad was seen as a person who knew how things should happen.

SM: What I was going to add was that over in east town, they built a church, and they didn't have any carpenters. When they finished, the church started to bulge out. So, what do they do? Call Dimitro Melnychuk! He'll know what to do. And he did. He ordered two long steel rods from Winnipeg. On the outside he put boards like that and they're threaded on there until it sucked it back to where it should be, and then it stayed that way.

Q: He could take the rods out then?

SM: No, the rods stayed there holding it together. But nobody else could think of what to do.

Q: So, he put the rods inside the church.

SM: Inside, yes. Right through the building.

Q: We used to do that in the granaries.

SM: Yes, because the 2x4s would bulge out after they'd get grain inside there. Well that was the same thing there. And anything, saw, every saw around there would come down to our place to get sharpened. Dimitro, he knew how to do that.

Q: You were so young when he died.

SM: Oh yes, I was seven when he died. I can't help but regret that he didn't live long enough for me to do some work with him, like build a house. He built the house there and it stayed there. I don't know if it's still, it's been breaking away. But I was there one year and I took a picture, I've got it someplace, a picture of the corner that he built with tools that he had, just an axe and a saw.

Q: Was this a log house?

SM: Log house, yes. He tapered it with a nice straight corner in there. He was a tradesman, a real good tradesman.

JM: Wasn't there also a story about people coming to him because he knew how things were done? They were looking for him to organize or be the leader in organizing something? This Tkachuk - wasn't it him that knew the organization needed bylaws?

SM: Yes, his name is in there.

JM: Because why?

SM: Because he was the secretary or president of the thing.

JM: He just somehow knew this. He learned it in the old country, I think, and he brought it with him and people turned to him.

SM: He never went back to the old country.

JM: No, he never went back. But you said he took schooling in the old country.

SM: About that loom that we had, we were short of parts for it. There's the reach and the other part missing, and he couldn't get it anywhere here. So she had to write to the old country and that loom that she had there, they took that part and packed it up and shipped it to us. But they put something on top of it and broke it in half, so we had to fix it when we got it here. We had to splice some pieces together to make up for that, and we did use it after that.

Q: Do you remember your mother working on the loom?

SM: Oh absolutely.

Q: How long does it take to make a piece of cloth?

SM: It depends how thick of a thread. Bang bang zoom, bang bang zoom – it depends how long you want to stay there. I wouldn't know how many yards a day you would make, but it takes quite a while.

Q: What would she make out of the material?

SM: She did linen in one direction and weave and wharf, she'd put the linen one way and wool the other way. She had jackets made for my brother and me and we had a different material, checkerboard, and made it for the neighbours that had the sheep that we got the wool from. But the wool, we spun all that wool. I did a lot of spinning. Any spare minute, boy you'd be out there spinning wool.

Q: What did you use to spin it with?

SM: Well we had a little machine. We could do it by hand but we weren't too experienced in it by hand. You'd turn the bobbin with your fingers like that. When we got home from school mother's sitting there.

Q: But you didn't have a big spinning wheel?

SM: Oh yes, it was modern made. There's all kinds, not one style. There's all kinds. I've seen them at museums.

JM: Didn't your mom dye wool and threads too?

SM: Oh yes. You get wool, it's all white and then you colour it. When they did that jacket for the other guy, it was white and black checkered.

JM: It was a plaid or herringbone.

SM: She could make the designs on the thing, there's lines on there. She could do checkerboard, herringbone, and some others. It all depends. You've got four pedals and four lines going, and how you work your pedals is what you get on to there. We learned enough to do herringbone and all that, and the rag rugs were easy enough. All that little bit of knowledge is still in there, I still remember all that. We not only had flax, we had hemp too.

Q: How did you process the hemp?

SM: Same as the flax – water and all that. Then we had special machines there. First of all, you put it on with a piece of wood to break it up, and then you got teeth and pull it through, and then

you go into finer until you're down to just the linen, nothing else. Before that you've still got chunks of stuff.

Q: And you used the hemp for what? For ropes?

SM: It was the same as linen. We made grain sacks. That one we made was a green colour; both were green but one was darker than the other. She got the jackets for that. Boy they were so warm when you got that wool there. What a difference. These synthetics you use here, they won't do anything. And socks, you could knit socks and mitts.

JM: Did she knit?

SM: No, my mom didn't knit. But there were a lot of young women there that knit.

Q: Did you leave Manitoba while your mother was still alive?

SM: No, that was in 1939. Yes, I've got to go back. I was 15 and a half years old. Threshing time comes along in July. No big farmers around, so I grabbed a freight train in Cowan and went up to Portage la Prairie. From there I switched to the CPR and went to Brandon, and south of Brandon I got a job as a teamster. What it means is you've got to get up early in the morning and feed your horses, and then you curry them and clean the manure away, feed them and all that. You don't get paid any more money than the field pitcher. The field pitcher, all he has to do is use the fork and that's all he looks after. There might've been a difference in the price, I'm not sure. But it was around \$2 a day.

Q: You were working as a teamster on threshing crews?

SM: On a threshing crew, yes, when I was 15-1/2 years old. But I had enough experience - imagine, 15 years and I had enough experience to go out there and take on a job. First of all I was stoking, and then after that was threshing. I put in 10 days stoking and 21 days threshing. The farmer had five quarters and then he did a couple of the neighbours. As you're going up there you're sleeping outside. You're in a boxcar, that's all you've got as your home. That's something I missed here. We got to Portage la Prairie and you're broke, you're hungry, and there's not many jobs hiring yet. Some guy, I guess he was watching me. He says, young kid there, I'm gonna give him a hand. He says, c'mon with me. We went into a residential section and knocked on a door. A guy comes out, and he says, could you spare us some food? I didn't say it, but I was out there begging for food. The guy says, wait here. You don't know whether he's gonna call the police or what he's gonna do. Anyway, he's gone for quite a little while and comes back with a paper bag and hands it to us. We thanked him and went. All we had was tomato sandwiches, but it was better than nothing. On the way back this guy, I guess he'd been doing this before. He went into a Chinese restaurant and they give you a spoonful of tea. So we get back. There's cans there. We heat up a fire and make the tea and we're having supper. That's something that you really remember.

Q: Where was this?

SM: By the river. I was a hobo at 15-1/2 years old. It's part of my life. I tell you, I'm not making up any story at all. Anything that I say, a lot of this stuff, over here I've got all kinds of stuff to prove some of the things that I did. Then after I finished there, they drove us into Brandon and on the radio we hear, Canada declared war on Germany. But I'm only 15 years old. So I took a bus, I'm a bigshot, going home by bus from Brandon to Cowan. I got to Cowan about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I was going home and the teacher was there and saw me and stopped. He wanted to know if I wanted to go back to town but I said no, and went home the rest of the way. Then I thought maybe they might have some more threshing. They did still have some threshing I mean, so I still did some threshing back home in Cowan. Then I got the measles. We had that other little house on the side and we were renting it out to an old woman pensioner who paid us \$2 a month or something. Paul put a stone door in; he was already a little bit of a carpenter. I couldn't go outside or anything with the measles.

My mother was making cabbage ready for a sale and we had a little granary on the side of the house. She was there cleaning all these off. She came in for lunch and she got up and went again outside. After 15 minutes she came back in and said, oh I've got a headache. So I said, well lie down. She got up to lay down and she fell down. Paul and I picked her up, took her to the bed and put her down. She was claiming that her head was hurting her. The last thing I heard her say was she called my sister, who was 13 years old then, and said, rub my forehead. And that was it.

Q: What did she die from?

SM: Aneurism. So here we are, orphans.

Q: But your brother was quite a bit older.

SM: I was 15, he was 17, but we were all orphans. Child Welfare came in and took my sister and they wanted me to go back to school. I was 15, I should've, but I didn't. We decided that we wanted to stay on the farm. We'd lived there all our lives. The people got together and signed a petition to leave us stay on the farm. So they said, okay, you wanna stay, you stay. This was in the fall. She died on the 15th of October, so this was in the fall. So we stayed there, we had cattle to look after and all that.

JM: That's just you and uncle Paul.

SM: Yes, they took Rose to a foster home. So we carried on that winter. That was cordwood country there; you could make your living of cordwood. Lots of poplar trees there. So they would cut the cordwood there and sell it in Winnipeg. There was no gas around then, so everybody burnt wood in the stove. We carried the winter through and one day Paul came up to me and said, you know what, I don't think we should be staying here. I says, you know, I've

been thinking the same way. No future on an 80 acre farm. It's not the whole farm, because you had a bit of a slough in there. They drained the slough after we left and had the whole 80 acres open. So we decided, what are we going to do? We're going to have a sale. I got on the train and went to Sifton where my sister was, and made arrangements there. She had four children, so her and her husband hired a truck and went to Cowan for Saturday sale, and I stayed there and looked after the four kids. The mare was in foal and expecting any minute there and all that. She had a filly and they just got back and were happy. They come over and stayed at Victoria's place for about a week. Child Welfare came in and put us in foster homes.

Q: You were 15 or 16 by this time.

SM: Yes, I was 16 already, because this was in the spring of 1940. I turned 16 in January, so I was 16 and my brother was still 17 because his birthday was in April. So we went to the foster home and in about a month or so they go up and say to my brother that he's going to go to school in Winnipeg - trade school. But I couldn't go because I wasn't old enough. I was too old for going back to one school but too young for the other, so I stayed back and Paul went to Winnipeg. Dauphin had their own power plant and it burnt cordwood. There was a pile of cordwood by our place and this one guy came up with a truck and he'd take a load of cordwood and take it to the powerhouse. I said, I'll go out there and talk to him. I handled cordwood ever since I was young, so I had no problem helping him load the truck. He was happy and gave me a roll of cigarettes. So I did that for a while until the woodpile disappeared. So I went uptown and there was a dealership there, a guy last name was Dobbin who owned it. He had three boys: one boy was in the army, one boy was a milkman, and the other one was in high school. I'd go there and talk to him, same thing, get cigarettes and tobacco. One day the phone rang and he went to answer the phone. He would take an old plow in and exchange it for a brand new tractor that he would sell or something, so he'd take that plow, clean it up and paint it and sell it to somebody else. So he's painting this plow and goes to answer the phone, and I pick up the brush and keep painting. So he comes back and says, you know, how would you like to work for me? I said, I'd love to work for you.

Q: This is the implement dealer.

SM: Yes. He said, I can't pay you more than \$1 a day. I said, that's okay. I went out and found myself room and board for 75 cents a day, and I went over there and told them that I'm moving out.

Q: The foster home.

SM: Yes. The foster home wasn't bad, but they didn't realize that we were young boys that worked hard and ate big. They're feeding us like mice. But anyway Paul was gone already so I went over there. They had a son, he was ready to go in the army too at the time. So I worked there until August, and then I took a freight train. I was broke too, because I couldn't save much money on a dollar a day. So I went to Portage la Prairie again and stayed in a coal camp

overnight. Next morning went to the labour board or whatever it's called. These two farmers living across the road from the site, one guy wanted two men and the other guy wanted one man.

Q: For a farm hand?

SM: Yes, this was threshing time. So that guy that wanted one man, he took me. He had a tractor and he pulled two binders with the tractor, so you have to have a tractor driver and two operators. Well the guy on the binder, if something goes wrong you gotta be able to holler so the tractor driver can hear. Well the one they had there, the guy didn't have the voice. So he asked me, have you ever operated a binder? Oh yes - but I never did. But anyway he put me on there, and when I bellowed he heard me.

Q: What kind of tractor was he driving?

SM: It was a Massey Harris. On the second day he come up to me and says, you never operated a binder before. I guess I turned red in the face. But anyway I had no problem after that, and finished it off. Then I went again and got two horses threshing. After I finished threshing there, I got out of there with about \$75 or something like that. From there I went to Winnipeg to visit my brother. I was going to stay overnight, but I've got to back up a little bit. There was two other guys that were working at this farm, and the three of us went into Winnipeg. One of them had a friend and we stayed at that friend's place overnight and that night went to see a picture show, something I'd never done. Guess which one? It was the one about the Mountie and the woman, famous. But it was new then I guess.

Q: Something about how the Mountie always gets his man.

SM: Yes. It was very popular. The guy said, we'll pick you up tomorrow morning. No, they went and I went with them the next day and they bought a car for \$50, an old Whippet. We figured the harvest was finished there but they were still harvesting in Saskatchewan. So we packed up and went as far as Dauphin and they were building an airport there. We figured if we could get on we'd work on the construction there, so we slept overnight in the car so we'd be there first in the morning. But they weren't hiring. If you were a carpenter or plumber or electrician, boy you'd get a job right away. But they had enough labourers, so we took off and went back to the department of labour there.

No first of all we did go to Saskatchewan and we couldn't find anything so we came back to Dauphin. The lumber camp was hiring so we packed up the car and went out that way as far as we could drive, about 10 miles from Westgate. They parked the car there and we went out there. We go there and the guys, they were farmers, they had never worked in a lumber camp. I never worked in a lumber camp but I worked on lumber and knew all about that. So, I was put on the crew, we were building a road for the winter because in wintertime they'd be hauling stuff through there and you don't want stumps sticking up. So, I worked on that gang and they worked on something else, but they only worked a few days and they left; that wasn't their thing. I

worked there for a couple days more and then one of the foremen came up to me and said, how would you like to work in the kitchen? I said, well sure; it's wintertime, it would be nice to be inside. Well the only one that was working there besides the cook was just me. I had to peel all the potatoes, wash all the dishes and cutlery, wait on tables, sweep the floor. I didn't have a spare moment, but I stuck with it for about two weeks. I was working too hard, no time off or anything. So I went back on the road, but this time they sent me with a couple of old guys who were almost like contractors. They'd go cut a tree down, cut it into 10 foot blocks or something, and every time they cut a tree down you'd have to delimb it. So I was the limber.

Q: With an axe?

SM: Yes. I'd been using an axe since I was seven years old, so it was no problem for me. So I worked on that but a few days later I'm wearing out my clothes. If I have to buy clothes, I have to buy it off of them, and they were double price. I'd never get out of there alive, so I left. I took the freight train again from there, no it was a passenger train, and I went back to my home town, Cowan. I knew all the people there, and I stayed there for about two weeks.

Q: Where did you stay?

SM: Peter Holiday's place. We did some work. It was in the fall, hunting season. One of the guys from southern Manitoba had a service station. He come in and shot a deer and he told us where and we went down to pick it up. He was a Dutchman. For milk they say milik. He says, I'm going to go out today and get myself an elek. I thought to myself, I'm glad I'm not Alec. I don't think he did get an elek. But it's right next to the reserve. There's a line there and you've got to make sure you shoot them on this side of the line. Anyway, we went and picked it up. I remember we were there with the horses and we got close and the horses raised their heads and snorted; they could smell the wild meat. We had to drag it up a hill, so we just dragged it up the hill. There was a little bit of snow, so we hauled it up there and took it in. The next day I guess they skinned it. I can't remember now, I didn't do any skinning but he skinned it and packed it up into his Miata car. I guess it wasn't that big a deer; it was a mule deer.

Q: But meanwhile you're unemployed, you're not earning any money.

SM: I'm not earning any money but I have a few dollars, not much though. But because they're good friends, I stayed there for about two weeks. Then the Dutchman was going back home south and my sister lived in Sifton at a fishing river. So, I caught a ride with him up to the road that turns off to Sifton; it's five miles after the highway. So, you go five miles but from there it's another nine miles to my sister's place. That didn't matter, five or ten miles was nothing – you had to do it, you'd do it. I walked to Sifton and the guy that owned a farm was a good friend of my dad's. I think my dad did some work for him on that mill. So, I stopped there and borrowed a bicycle from one of the kids there and went down to my sister's place, and we brought it back after a couple of days. I went to my sister's place and stayed there all winter.

They had six horses and every day, you have to take the horses across the road to his brother's place for watering, because he didn't have enough water in his well. We did that. We dug a bit of a well and then we went and got wood and sawed it up and split it. So I was working; I wasn't getting paid... I'd go into town for the mail, about three miles. Getting towards, oh I've got to do something, I can't live this way. He says, well I know this farmer in Valley River, I'll talk to him. So he talked to him, ya he wants. Said he'd give me \$15 a month and room and board. I went over there and worked there for three or four days. It's not for me. He just wanted a partner for his son or something, so I went back to Victoria's. I wrote a letter to this farmer in Portage la Prairie that I worked at that I was running a binder for, and asked if they needed help. I got a letter right back – you can work here starting April 1st, \$25 a month room and board for eight months; \$200. So I took it. But again, no money! They're living in a fishing river and I have to go to...

Q: This is during the war already, times are better.

SM: But things are just starting to roll. I have to get to Portage la Prairie. How do I get there? I know where he lives and it's right outside the railroad, you can't miss it. But I have to go by rail. I go to Sifton first, his brother-in-law's dad lived there; I went to sleep there. I no sooner fell asleep he comes to wake me up, the train is here. Nine miles I had to walk, after supper I walked up there. So, then I caught the train there and went to Dauphin, which is 20 miles away. I met a guy there. I did have 15 cents or something like that. I did go in and I think I had a coffee and a doughnut in Dauphin. So, we get on the train. This guy that I'm with, he's going all the way to Niagara Falls to build a bridge there or something. But I wouldn't go that far away. We got to Portage la Prairie and I'm broke of course. He took me into a restaurant and he bought me a coffee. So, then I've got to get to this farmer but I don't know how to get there by highway, I wouldn't know which corner to turn off at. So, I go get on the railroad track again, 16 miles. Did you ever walk along a railroad? It's hard. I had rubber boots all worn out and everything, thin. Of course, I didn't have no baggage, I had a shirt maybe or something, I don't know. So I'm heading back north to his place. I'm going along and all of a sudden, the train comes along and I have to get off the track. This is the end of March and there's snow that deep on the sides. I just get back on there, another train coming the other way. I left my sister's at 7 o'clock in the evening, this was about 7 o'clock the next day that I got there. Tired, hungry, hadn't eaten, but I made it. I just had the desire that you had to do it.

Q: How long did you work for this farmer?

SM: Eight months.

Q: And when you left there, you were a rich man.

SM: Oh yes, I had \$165 left. I'd drawn some out for some clothes I bought and tobacco. Incidentally, it's 50 years since I quit smoking now.

Q: What did you do after that?

SM: From there I went to Winnipeg and there were no shops open.

Q: But it was good times.

SM: But they hadn't started, the right things hadn't started. So, I got a job delivering sales pamphlets. They don't pay you by the day, they pay you by the piece – half a cent per piece or something. If you worked all day long the most you could make, I don't know if you could make \$2. One day I went to the labour thing there and there's a Jew in there had a dray outfit. So, I got a job with him and we'd go pick up beer and pop and bread and all kinds of things and deliver it out to the country. I come back 11 o'clock at night, he gave me my dollar and pushed me out the door. That's how it was, nobody gave a damn. But that's how I stayed alive. So then my turn came. I was still 17 I think or maybe I was 18, and they gave me a call to go to school in Winnipeg to trade school. So, I picked machine shop. I took up lathe work and stuff like that, eight weeks. It was wartime so the school was going 24 hours a day. My shift was from midnight until about 8 in the morning. There would be three shifts I guess, or something like that.

Q: Why were there shifts?

SM: They were short of schools. They didn't have enough schools to teach kids so they kept them going. The guys who were going into the army or air force were in the daytime, but I wasn't going for that, so I had to take the graveyard shift. It was eight weeks of that. Where I lived and where the school was, I had to go about three miles or something. To get over there, you had to go over top of the rail tracks and all that. The first week that I started, I did that, and in the morning, carried pamphlets. Well that didn't last very long, I just couldn't hack it. You didn't get enough rest or enough sleep or nothing, so I quit and just stayed with that and didn't have no other job after that in Winnipeg.

Q: But you went to trade school.

SM: Oh yes.

Q: Did they pay your way?

SM: Oh yes, they paid your way. They paid your way and I think I drew some kind of wage like \$8 a week or something like that. When I finished, they shipped me to Fort William - that's' called Thunder Bay now. There was a Canadian Car and Foundry and they were building airplanes, the Hawker Hurricane. They had a contract from, what's now Bombardier. Before that, it was something else. We got a lot of our stuff from there and we had a contract for that Hawker Hurricane. We were assembling it there too. It was assembled, put in boxes and shipped out. My job when I first got started was...

Q: You were an apprentice?

SM: Well something like that - a riveter. I was a riveter's helper when I started but I ended up being a riveter after that. At the end I was working by myself doing aileron hinges. There was a guy in there, Martin Busby, from Saskatchewan. He had asthma really bad. I was in there until I got my army call.

Q: Conscription was in place already?

SM: Yes. I got my call, and I went. I had a bad right eye, something happened when I was born or whatever that I didn't have good eye. I still don't know; I look at you now and can't recognize you. So they gave me a discharge. I went back to work. Busby told me to join the air force. He's got asthma so bad, and he joined the air force. So I says, what the hell, I can do that too. I went over and tried for pilot first of all, but I didn't have enough education and my right eye, that was it. But they said, we'll give you mechanic, air frame mechanic. Okay, I'll take it. So I take it and I get the mumps. I get the mumps and have to go to isolation hospital for a couple of weeks.

Q: This was in which city?

SM: Fort William. So I finish that and I come out and get on the train. They pay for it. They even give you meal tickets and everything. I go to Brandon and there's a bunch of other guys there with suitcases and everything and you're marching. You're in the air force, haven't got a uniform yet, but you're there. That's when you become an airman there.

Q: So you wanted to be in the army.

SM: Oh yes. I didn't want to be in the army really, but ...

Q: But when they wouldn't accept you into the infantry, you went into the air force.

SM: Yes. Even in the air force we had rifle drill. At target practise I went in there and I got five shots. There was one bull's eye and one just nipped the board, and the rest were... I think it was harder to see. That was the beginning of my air force there. It was right downtown in Brandon in the skating park, so we were in there until we got our identification, shots and everything else.

Q: And then they sent you overseas?

SM: No, from there they sent us to another place in Brandon where we got advanced training. Then you're not a mechanic yet. From there they sent me to Regina and I was there until the end of the year. . . . In that eight months of work that I had to do, at the end of the work when the threshing was done there was no natural gas around yet; people used to use wood. So we went out on a Saturday nine miles away from home and it was all stuff that had fallen down, so we made a load ready for Monday. Of course, he came from the States and he was living in the bush

so when we were finished making that load there he says, you know what, you don't need me here, you know more about this than I do. So I started hauling wood. There's another one, I should've started out different before. Before I went in the woods I hauled out some grain to the elevator there four miles away, hauled grain and picked up a load of coal from there.

Q: Which town was that?

SM: That was outside of Portage la Prairie at a place called McDonald. I took that load and dumped it, went and backed into the boxcar for the coal. There's an engine in this, pushing cars around. I had two horses, four year-old geldings, so they get the line caught and there's the tongue. I backed them in there and I'm going to go around and unbutton it. I no sooner stepped off the back of the wagon, then the goddam engine scared the horses away. So, they were running down there going towards home, running down the highway a mile and a half. A farmer was working in the field with a tractor and he saw this. He was a pretty smart man and knew what he was doing. He left the gate open and took his jacket off and was waving the jacket, and the horses turned into the yard. But what if I would've been in front of the horses when that happened?

Anyway that was one case there, and in this other case, I was hauling nine miles. Every day I had to go pick up a load, make up a load, and put on a load for the next day, then come home and I still had chores to do. So we started hauling with the wagon and then it started snowing. I've got it anchored down, I know how to haul lumber. I grew up with lumber. That's why he said I didn't need him there. So I'm going with this load and for some reason, there were two shallow ditches on the sides. Sometimes they decided running, so I pulled over into the ditch, go ahead. They slowed down and started walking. There was this one other time I was hauling wood with the wagon. I loaded the night before and I was getting ready to go for that other one. The neighbours were getting some wood too but they had a John Deere tractor and they stopped and had coffee at the house. Would you believe it, the minute they hooked it up - I was just bending down for the hitch and the John Deere tractor started. There's a gate out front and I'm running with the light in my hand, so I let it go because there's no room between the wagon and the gate. So they went out in the field a little ways and they turned around and came back.

Q: They were spooky horses.

SM: Well I tell you, I fed them quite a bit of oats. . . . I told you all about when I worked at aircraft plants and joined the air force. I was living in Fort William at the time. When I joined up, right away I had the mumps. Did I say that already?

Q: Yes, so you went to England and you were a mechanic there. There was quite a controversy about people joining up. The government was talking about conscription and there was a backlash. Why did you join up?

SM: I got my call to the army and I went, and I had a bad right eye, something in my eye that I couldn't see with and I couldn't shoot. So, I was in the army there for two days, and they sent me to a specialist in Port Arthur, an eye specialist. He said no, I'm not suitable for it. So I get a discharge from the army, so I go back to work at the aircraft plant. There was a guy there by the name of Martin Busby, he's from Saskatchewan and he's got asthma so bad. He goes down and joins the air force. Well when he comes back and he's joined the air force I said, what the hell. My brother had already joined the year before. So, I went down there and applied for pilot. Well my eye and education, that was cancelled out. They said, we could take you in as a mechanic.

Q: You talked about this at the end of the last interview. Did you come to Alberta after your air force days?

SM: Oh yes. I went to school in Winnipeg and stuff like that for my autobody repair work. I went to school for six months. So this is how I'll start. After the six months, I came to Alberta because my brother was stationed here. My one sister was married and the other sister got married. Right after the war she went down to Nova Scotia and married a bluenoser from over there. So I come here and with six months schooling I was going to get a job.

Q: What year was that?

SM: 1948. So I was trying to get a job, and everywhere I go they ask, "You got experience?" No, I just finished school. No, we want somebody with experience. Where are you going to get a guy with experience when the guys have been to war and everything? I didn't know what the heck to do. I went to the DVA and the guy says, you know what? I live right next door to Jack Burrows. Burrows Motors was a Dodge dealer. So he asked him and he said, yes, tell him to come in. So, I went in there and he says, you have no experience, we can only give you 50 cents an hour. So, I went to work. I looked around and one other guy there that doesn't know his work too well, he's getting even bigger money. I'm working away keeping quiet. I worked about three months and finally went up to the foreman and said, look, and I'm doing work that they're collecting for. They're collecting \$1.75 an hour for my work. So I went to him and he went to the top and talked to the guys and he came back to me and gave me a raise to 75 cents an hour and gave me some back pay. They realized what they were doing. They were killing a job because maybe I would've quit my work. So, I worked there for two years before I changed to something else.

Q: What was it like being an autobody repairman in those days?

SM: Well, when I went to school in Winnipeg, I had to do welding first of all. That's the first thing. Metal stripping, sanding and preparing for paint, painting and all of that. A lot of guys went in there and would stick with one, stick with body work. I didn't, I did body work and painting. I ended up at one time that I did nothing but painting for Edmonton Motors just strictly painting, and I turned out some big jobs. Towards the end there I got to really paint well.

Q: How long did you work in the autobody business?

SM: About 25 years. Anyway, after two years I went to Calgary for my journeyman papers. You had to have four years, but they gave me some time off for being overseas, six months of school is worth two years, so all I did was go there and wrote my papers and I got my certificate. April 1950 I went to Calgary for four weeks and got my papers.

Q: Then you came back to Edmonton?

SM: Everybody did that. Once a year, you'd go four weeks for school. But I didn't go any other time, I just went that one six months and then I went the one month here and that was it. The thing was, I caught on to the job pretty good - a hardworking Ukrainian boy. Anything I did, I did well. I never thought of taking shortcuts - you did it, you did it right. I never had any problems, any comebacks for anything.

Q: So you just stuck with autobody all this time? You didn't get into other parts of the car?

SM: Oh yes we did upholstery inside and stuff like that that you had to do; door locks and things like that, putting in glass.

JM: Autobody in those days meant if you came in with a bent fender you didn't put a new one on, you made that fender work again.

SM: I'm seeing that back fender get fixed three times, the same fender - straighten it out. But the metal was thicker then. In about 1960 they started to go down. They're so thick you can put your thumb and bend it. But we would fix fenders that were crumpled up.

JM: It was labour intensive; they didn't have jacks. And it smelled of thinners and gas and all this stuff.

SM: It's hard on your health, ya.

Q: It seems that the opportunity was there to breath in bad stuff, that the health and safety aspect was lacking.

SM: It makes me wonder why is it I'm still alive. But I was going to mention, I went to work at Edmonton Motors as a painter. Anybody who worked in the paint shop got a quart of milk every day, and every so often you just took a drink of milk. Every morning the milkman would come.

Q: Why was that?

SM: Because they felt that it cleared the paint fumes out of you. I don't know who thought of it or anything, but that's what they did. So, I drank a quart of milk every day.

Q: Were people around you getting sick?

SM: Well not that I noticed. At that time, I was in the paint shop there, that was before Judy was born. I got a kidney infection. What it was from I don't know, but I started passing blood. I went to the doctor and he gave me some pills and I stayed on them for a week or something. I went back to work, I was okay, but then it came back. This time the doctor gave me something stronger and said, take those until you finish them and don't go to work. So I did what he said. After it was finished, he tested me. They have a special test that they get some sample right out of your kidneys, checked it out and I was okay. Judy is 62 years old.

Q: There was no union. What kind of benefits did you have?

SM: We had hardly any benefits. I was going to just say, I was working in Stewart Burrows at that time. I had to go get a tooth pulled. Well, I had to go around the building so nobody could see that I left. I had to pay for it myself and then I had to sneak back in again so they wouldn't deduct anything off my pay.

Q: No sick leave.

SM: No sick leave, no. You didn't get paid for sick leave. At that time you had no holiday pay. You had a 54-hour week.

JM: I remember you worked Saturdays.

SM: Ya Saturday all day. You only got the one day off. You were working for 75 cents an hour with no overtime.

Q: Did you sometimes work overtime?

SM: There were times at other places that I had worked overtime. But you don't feel like it after you put a day's work, bashing. You should see how many cuts I had on my hands, how many times I went to get something out of my eye. The last time that I went they wanted a reason what happened and I said, I don't know what happened. They wrote a letter back, Workers Comp, and they said, how is it the last 22 times you knew what happened and now you don't know what happened? Twenty-two times I was in just for eye – steel, gravel. I remember one time I got gravel, I think that was the one, that's why I couldn't tell. I got a piece of gravel in the eye, a nice big chunk. It was on a Friday. I come home and it bothered and bothered. I went to try to go to sleep, I couldn't sleep. I got up a 2 o'clock in the morning and went up to the General Hospital, which is over 110 St & Jasper Ave, 2 o'clock in the morning. The guy that was on duty had just did a cast for somebody and he couldn't see anything so he sent me down to the operating room. They had a big magnet there and they tried to see if there was any steel, and it didn't pull it out. I come home again and I couldn't sleep. The doctor was open on Saturday morning so I went over

there and he took one look and said, who's been working on your eye? I told him and he said, well they should have got hold of me, I'm your doctor.

Q: Snee Horwich, small snowflake.

SM: Ya. So anyway, he took it out and I went home and just wanted to sleep. That was about the worst one, but I had a lot of them.

Q: It makes me wonder about personal protective equipment.

SM: That's right, nothing. Any equipment you had was your own. They didn't have any first aid kit or anything. They should've had goggles for everybody in there, and breathing. I breathed in a lot of stuff. At that time, I still smoked, so it was a toss-up which was the worst.

Q: Were you ever collecting Workers Compensation?

SM: Oh ya, now and then for different things. I went one time, hit myself with a hammer right on the leg and it swole up and I was on compensation for a couple of months. There were several times, I don't know how many times, but a few times I was on compensation. They give you 75 percent of your wages.

JM: I remember you never wore gloves. He always had stitches. He got to the point he'd go get stitches and never get freezing, just said, do the stitches.

SM: There was a thing that was sharp and I grabbed it somehow and got cut right across both. I went to the University hospital. At that time I had calloused hands from all the paint and thinners, just rough. I said, well where are you going to freeze it? I says, don't freeze it. It was a Japanese intern. I said, just go ahead. So, he did it, three or four stitches. Once you get that first bite then it doesn't hurt. At the end he said, you're a tough man.

Q: When you'd be off work, would the company be paying you?

SM: No, compensation would pay. But any other time, if you didn't show up for work you wouldn't get paid for that day.

Q: Was there any talk in the shop about the boys unionizing?

SM: I was going to come to that. One Saturday, I went out for a haircut and there's a guy there that I know by the name of Lloyd Schwap, and we started talking about that. It started right from there. Then we went in and tried to get somebody to take us on; we got to have a union. IAM wouldn't take us because they're machinists. So that's fine, we went to Sheetmetal Workers Union. They said they would take us on, so we had a big meeting and called people in. It was about \$75 per person, so they rolled it down to \$1 a person for initiation. So we went to collect

the dollar off these guys. Well some guys had it, and some guys didn't have the dollar in their pocket. I started going and driving to their house and picking up the dollars. They should've been breaking my door down for that dollar.

But that's just how much the Alberta government or even the Canadian government teach their people about unions. In schools they don't tell you anything about unions. They talk about money, how it's hard to deal with money and all that, but they don't tell you how to deal with labour. Then we had Social Credit and Conservatives and all those guys; they're all anti-union. We had a hard time with the government. They wouldn't help at all. Anyway, I ran down and burned my own gas and picked up. I lived in Beverly and drove to the south side to pick up in Oliver. It was hard. Anyway, the companies find out, oh yes, right away they're afraid they're going to lose their jobs. And they could, there wasn't a law that said you couldn't get fired. I didn't worry because I knew my work and did it well, and anybody that would fire me would be crazy, because this is their money. I didn't get fired but I know guys that did. So those guys got together, all the garage companies, and had a meeting. We raised the wages 10 cents an hour. What happened though, our boys started falling out. They brought in a guy from Hamilton, the Sheetmetal Workers Union, last name was Gall. I forget his first name.

Q: He stayed on in the Sheetmetal Workers and became the general manager.

SM: Yes. He married a farm girl here. Anyway, he's gone; he died. I saw it in the paper.

Q: Was he a good organizer?

SM: Well yes, he was a young man, and he was a good organizer. But it's just that the people are so stupid.

Q: Did you ever get to vote?

SM: No. I think we did come to that. He had a contract written up.

Q: But did you ever get to vote to have a union? Were you ever certified?

SM: No, we were never certified. As soon as we'd get close, something would happen. Those guys, you could buy them for a nickel or for a dime.

JM: When dad was doing this organizing, I was very aware of it; I was about six. I remember the fear, because my dad felt that he was being followed because he was the organizer driving around.

SM: And you get a bad name.

Q: Do you get a bad name in the community with the other Ukrainians?

SM: Oh no, I think most Ukrainians were for it. But it's just that the young people, when I started in that I started reading books. There's one guy that I knew; he was a strong Socialist. He was a body man too, and he started giving me books on labour and all that.

Q: It wasn't Tomaschuk, was it?

SM: No, I met him later. . . . He married that widow . . .

Q: So, finally you just gave up trying to unionize?

SM: Finally, I had to give up. I didn't keep any of that stuff. I had all kinds of stuff but I got rid of it. Then we went our own ways and our own jobs, but I still continued to see him. I was working on the south side at a Fraser dealer. I went to the foreman and said I wanted to. I can't work on the money I'm making. He wanted us to work overtime one time and we all refused to work overtime. Anyway, guess what, he comes up with five cents, five cents an hour. I packed up my tools and moved right out.

Q: You had a family at this time.

SM: Oh yes. I think Janice was in high school.

JM: Oh, I was thinking it was earlier. Our childhood was for sure. My dad was self directed, and if he didn't feel he was treated right he would say, no I'm going somewhere else. He worked at lots of body shops, but mostly small body shops.

SM: I went to dealerships, Edmonton Motors. I'll just add something to Edmonton Motors. I was a painter there and I did good work, no problem. But I did a little work on the side.

Q: Autobody work?

SM: Yes, and they found out. The manager came up and he said, oh I hear that you're doing body work. Well, he says, if you are you'd better quit or we'll have to separate company. But I had some jobs started and I couldn't just drop them like that. So I kept on. But there was another guy working with me and he stayed. In Edmonton Motors at that time there was a guy there, Swiss. He was a bit scared that he was going to lose his job as a painter because I was doing much better work than he was. After the weekend I went back to work and he came out and said, well I guess we have to part company. He said, you're finished tonight but we'll give you two weeks holiday pay. They were pretty good that way. Well, I had never drawn unemployment insurance in my life, never! I could never be without a job because if you go to the labour board looking for employment, you will get a job there.

Q: It's a condition of drawing unemployment that you have to be looking for a job.

SM: Yes, and you get one. I applied for it, but before I got it, I got a job. So I was never out of a job. I went to several small shops and all that and I got stung a couple of times.

Q: Meanwhile you're trying to raise a family. Was your wife working outside the home?

SM: No, she didn't work too much. In the Fall she'd pick potatoes and stuff like that. But she didn't have education like me.

Q: I'm wondering how you could make ends meet then.

SM: It was hard. That's why I worked extra to try to make up for it. It didn't help that much.

Q: Were you able to afford a house?

SM: Well that's another story. I am also a carpenter. We got a lot from the in-laws. Well, we bought it off of them. Then I built a house. I worked bodywork at the daytime and doing carpentry at night. I built my own house. It took two years.

Q: Where was this house?

SM: Right here 48th Street and 121st Avenue.

Q: Is it still standing?

JM: Absolutely – 12122 – 48 Street.

SM: So I built that house and worked from paycheque to paycheque all that, and it cost me a total with the land and all, cost me a total of \$10,000. But I did all the work, well not myself, my brother and I. We built his house, we built my house, and that's how we got a house. I had a nice place.

Q: How long did you live in it?

SM: Forty-four years.

Q: Until you moved into here?

SM: No, we lived 44 years there and the wife started complaining about going up and down the stairs for the laundry and all that. So, we decided to sell, so put it up for sale and in two days it was sold. We didn't get enough for it. We should've kept it one more year and then we would've almost doubled our money.

Q: Where did you move to after that?

SM: We moved to an apartment at Manning Crossing.

JM: A brand new apartment on the main floor so it felt like a house. My mom had a whole new place to live, and she was so happy.

SM: What we had was two bathrooms, two bedrooms, and a little living room and kitchen and a dishwasher. We never had one before.

Q: So that was the place you lived in before you moved here?

SM: Yes. We lived there for four years.

Q: What year did your wife pass away?

SM: 2010.

Q: Let's go back to your years as a worker. Did you know Max Derpack? He was a mechanic.

SM: The name sounds right, yes.

Q: In that time, you were getting active, not just with the union but politically too.

SM: I started in '61 when they changed to NDP from CCF. Within the next year, we got involved. If I was organizing now, I know so much more people, and I would've got more help from them. Anyway, we got into it full hearted. The wife was socialist-minded too. We'd buy the potatoes and the wife wasn't working, so she'd sit at home and make perogies all week long, and we would have perogy suppers as a fundraiser. Most of it was my expenses, we bought that stuff and all the running around and all that, selling tickets. We were really involved in that.

Q: Why did you support the NDP? What did you think they could accomplish in this capitalist society?

SM: The thing is, I was a CCFer.

Q: What did you think the NDP could accomplish?

SM: Well, the thing in my head was that it was a working-class party. They're going to stick up for us. That's what I was thinking. They're going to stick up for the working man, which they did. The 40-hour week and holiday pay and all of these things, they came up after the NDP started putting a little power on. Some of the guys you ask them, who brought in the healthcare?

Oh, the Liberals. There's a guy, Bill Lesiuk, had a pharmacy not far from here. He was Conservative, got in there for one term. Anyway, I was going to a bowling alley on 54th Street and he was walking with another guy and he stopped me, because he belonged to the same Legion I did. I started talking to him and I says, Bill I'm sorry, you're running for the wrong party. He said, how so? I said, well just answer me, how did we get our healthcare? Well blah blah - and that ended that. I didn't vote for him, and he didn't get in either.

Q: I worked for that election for Ross Harvey; Ross Harvey beat him.

SM: Yes I worked for Harvey.

JM: When I was a kid my mom and dad started to get involved, and that meant you worked campaigns. People don't realize Northeast Edmonton is so important in the development of the Socialist Progressive movement, because this is where everybody came to run first. My mom and dad lived here, and that is partly why they did become so involved in the NDP and stayed involved because always the NDP had strong candidates here. Neil Reimer ran here, Ivor Dent ran here, John Ewasiw.

SM: Who was that guy who was crippled, Ray Jahma. Neil Reimer, Ivor Dent, on and on. What's his name, his daughter is a premier - Grant Notley!

Q: And you knew Jan Reimer?

SM: Oh Jan Reimer really. . . . Gordon Wright, all those guys. We had meetings in our house and we had meetings in other places.

Q: Being socialist, you could be ostracized by the Ukrainian community.

SM: Oh yes, absolutely.

Q: Did you ever feel that in those days?

SM: No, I didn't. I associated with all kinds of people. I had all kinds of friends. Of all those friends that we used to have, there's hardly any left, they've all died off.

Q: The guys working in the meatpacking plant?

SM: Yes, from there too. Yes, it's funny. Even some of those guys at the meatpacking plant. They're union but they don't really support union. No I don't think I've had anybody really. Well they wouldn't try to out talk me or something, because I'd have answers for them.

JM: Every Sunday, we'd have a big family dinner. But we didn't talk politics, because we all had different opinions. One of the reasons my dad loved the NDP and CCF is he saw them as not

being basically so much into religion. The Social Credit was strongly religious – Ernest Manning did his Sunday broadcast. My dad's most strongly held value in his life is that he was very anti-religion. In our family if you had religious people, you didn't talk about politics because they would not share the NDP values. That's why my dad felt that he really belonged there, because the NDP didn't, even though they had strong ministers like Tommy Douglas and all of them from a strong Christian ethic; he did not feel he was forced into those beliefs.

SM: What I saw and thought of Tommy Douglas, I don't think he was religious. He was a preacher, but I think that once he got into politics, I think religion finally moved away. You never heard him mention anything about religion.

Q: Were you a churchgoer yourself?

SM: Where we lived, we didn't have a church. We went to school, and that was Anglican. But I'm supposed to be Ukrainian Orthodox, that's what my parents were.

Q: Were they churchgoers?

SM: Well, they did whenever they could. But as I say, we had no church there. There was a church ten miles away from our place, and they might go there on some holiday or something. My dad and mom believed in socialism. They believed in the cooperative, so they were not strong...

Q: They weren't right-wingers.

SM: They were not right-wingers, no. In 1935, when Tommy Douglas was running in Saskatchewan and Aberhart was running over here.

JM: Not '35.

SM: In there someplace... We didn't have radio. So our neighbour, Tkachuk, he had connections. My mom sent me down to him to ask him who won the election. I can remember it really well. I was only a young fellow. He said, you tell your mother that her party didn't make it. That's what he told me.

Q: Did you ever get involved with the ULFTA?

SM: No.

Q: That hall on 97th Street?

SM: Oh yes, I was involved there. I used to go there. Your mom was a member of it all her life.

JM: My mom's mom was a more active member of that hall in Edmonton.

SM: That goes back to the hard times before the war yet, how things were so poor here and he had eight children. They didn't have food or something, they'd go to the government and they'd give them some help, but then they'd get him to work it back after.

Q: How come you never joined the Communist Party?

SM: I was asked, Doug Tonlinson on 58th Street there. Well they kind of put the pressure on me. I was in a meeting with them, but I guess I was afraid it was going to cost me money to belong, and I didn't have the money. I did donate some money to them. That Finlander, what was his name?

Q: Bill Tuomi?

SM: Yes, that's right. I remember going down to his place with \$20 and said, this is for your campaign.

Q: The '50s and '60s were the time of the Cold War.

SM: Yes, that's what it was, I guess. I remember some Russian came in with a group of actors. They had concerts and they were at that place there, and I went down there. I don't know who brought them. Nobody seemed to want to talk to them. So I went and started talking to them. They spoke Ukrainian. Nobody even offered them a beer, so I said, I'll buy a beer for the group.

Q: You never had a run-in with the nationalists?

SM: No.

Q: The nationalists were very strong in Vegreville . . .

JM: I think the difference is coming from a city or a small community. It's so different when you're in a city, that you can get lost in the crowd a bit.

SM: In Fort William, I was staying at this house and the lady was a Communist. In the wintertime one time, somebody came and splashed her house with red paint. I got paint and painted over it to cover it up. She wanted me to go to that hall and join the young people, but I didn't stay there that long anyway. But I started getting involved with that kind of people.

Q: Why have you been disappointed with the NDP?

SM: The guy in BC, Svend Robinson. He gave a bad name to the party.

Q: But you left the party when Grant Notley became the leader.

SM: Well we didn't leave the party completely. We just went to a different branch. We were the right-wingers and the other guys...

JM: You weren't the right-wingers.

SM: We were the right-wingers.

Q: You were the left-wingers.

SM: Yes, sorry. We were the left-wingers, and we broke away. We saw that party moving too far to the right, so we got out. We still went to their fundraisers and stuff like that; we still supported them. Even now, I donated money to that guy over here, Bilous. He used to come here when he was a member, didn't have the job then. That was before NDP got in here. He'd come over here, we'd be having Christmas dinner or something and he'd come in and bring flowers or something. I've got pictures over there of him and me.

JM: Remember the Waffle group. Ken Novakowski ran for it...

SM: President of the...

Q: He ran for leadership against Grant Notley?

JM: Yes I think so, or for the presidency or something.

SM: I know they wanted me to run as president of this area, but I just didn't have the education to take on that job.

Q: It must've been for the presidency of the party, because the one who ran against Grant was Gordon Wright.

JM: That's right. There was a real split, and you and mom definitely supported Ken Novakowski and the left-wing of the party.

SM: Ken came out and gave a speech, and it was a hell of a good speech. They had some guy that worked at the Celanese plant, some guy that nobody ever heard of, and he ran for the president and got in. That's when we dropped out. We couldn't support him.

Q: What about the Ukrainian community here in Edmonton? I notice lots of Ukrainian names.

SM: Well the thing is that if you belong to a church you're in an organization. Otherwise you're out. I don't go to church, that's another story. People ask. Margaret Becker one time when we

first come here; she's a very strong churchgoer. I was sitting on the swing out there and she came up and said, mind if I sit down? I said, no. She knew my wife and me, and she thought we were great people. But she was very religious. She says to me, Steve, when did you turn against religion, or why? I says to her, because I couldn't find anything that I could like about religion. I says, first of all, how many religions are there in the world? Which is the right one, which is the wrong one? I says Catholics, you've got the Greek Catholic, the Roman Catholic, and then you've got Anglican, high Anglican and low Anglican – it's all Catholic. Even the German one over here, Lutheran, that's Catholic too. There's so many of them that are Catholic, and if you had them all on the board like that, what would you pick? She didn't think too much and she never brought it up again. She's in the hospital now. Her room is right across from me here and they just did the rug this morning because it's already going to be rented out; she's not coming back. But she's 97 years old.

Q: I always felt that one reason people were anti-union and anti-NDP was partly because of their religion.

SM: Yes, it all adds in there. Religious people, you can't talk unions to them somehow. It makes you wonder. People are just like sheep. A leader says something, and they follow it and won't look for anything on their own. Like my kids. When they went to school and met the girls there, they would say, oh what's your church. They'd say, oh we don't go. Oh you should come, it's nice. So they go.

JM: My parents allowed us. They said, you want to go to church, you try it. So we did it when we were kids.

SM: They'd go several times and then they'd quit. . . . The thing is, I am a realistic guy, but not too many people are that way. I say with the Bible, who wrote the Bible? They take it like it come from God. Well who's this god? Where is he? All these kinds of things, that's my way of thinking. I just can't see it any other way. . . . That's reminds me, it was written by Pierre Burton, but I lived it. I was in England and we had to go to church on Sunday. One time it was Orthodox or Protestant and the next time it was Catholics. The Jews went uptown and stuff like that. I remember so well how we'd have songs and everything. And then they'd say, and now we will pray. Let us pray for our boys to come back safely from their journeys. I thought, you son of a bitch, what about the people that they killed, innocent people – women, children, cattle, everything they killed? You're not going to worry about that, just the guys who were carrying the bombs? How does it go? "Praise the lord and pass the ammunition!"

Q: Was the Ukrainian culture important to you, and is it going to survive here?

SM: I think it's going to survive; it's getting stronger.

Q: Was it important for you?

SM: Oh yes. The people in there, if you were Ukrainian you don't speak English. All the guys were, no speaky England. That's the way it was then. It has changed since then of course. There's so many intermarriages and stuff that things have changed some.

Q: Did you raise your children to be Ukrainians?

SM: They were when grandma was alive. They were Ukrainian. My one granddaughter went to Ukrainian class three years in high school, but she couldn't speak it because you had to have somebody to talk to. The alphabet she knows, she did everything but she can't carry a conversation.

JM: We spoke Ukrainian because of Baba but I don't remember anybody talking about going to Ukrainian dancing. My cousins went to Ukrainian dancing, so there was that. But I got ballet. I loved to dance so my dad found the money to send me to ballet. So I went to ballet, but not Ukrainian dancing.

Q: And your sister?

JM: No, she had no desire that way.

SM: She is musical but she didn't dance.

Q: So you didn't force your children to learn the Ukrainian culture?

SM: No, I didn't force them. My wife spoke some Ukrainian but not that great. I speak pretty good Ukrainian. She couldn't, so she would speak English to the children.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

JM: Kowalchuk.

Q: What do you think about what's happening today in our society?

SM: I'm not happy with a lot of the stuff that's going on - like what Russia is doing to Ukraine. I'm concerned about that because I'm afraid that Ukraine will be off the map someday if they don't stop. That's what it's looking like.

Q: You don't believe Putin?

SM: I think he's a strong man. He's done lots of things there his way. He's like Trump - him and Trump are a good pair.

Q: What future do you see for us here in Canada?

SM: All this immigration coming in, it's good for the country. But I'm afraid that they might take over the country because in time, the kids - they have large families. The leader of the NDP is a guy with a turban, and that's one step. We don't know what's going to happen. I just think that the people are really complacent.

Q: Have they moved away completely from socialism?

SM: Yes, I think they are moving that way pretty well. You don't even hear people talk too much. I've got one guy, he wanted to be here today, a friend of mine I worked with. When NDP wanted Alberta, the next morning he phoned me up and says, well we finally made it.

Q: They've done a few good things since then, and they're going to pay the price.

SM: They're going to pay the price. This is what gets me. Why are people so stupid? They're doing the best thing for the country. They get the farm help to have compensation – why not? I can speak on that a minute for you.

Q: Well you described how dangerous it was when you were working with horses.

SM: Well yes sure, that's right. But you take Ernie Manning. . . My sister went to work there at his house. She was a widow. She worked there and she was religious. She liked him because he was religious. She wouldn't get Sunday off because he was busy with his church, and they lived in the country. So, she would get Thursday off. He'd be going to work on Thursday and he would drive her, drop her off downtown, and then she'd take a bus back home. He drove practically past my place. He could've dropped her off. But no he went uptown and she took a bus back. Everything was going nice and when she spent the day at my place I'd drive her home every week. But she still believed him. Anyway, come springtime she was using the dryer and thing got stuck on the outside. So she went outside to break it loose, slipped on the ice, and broke her wrist. So, she couldn't work, so she got kicked out. No compensation, nothing, not a thing. He didn't pay her wages, didn't even pay for her hospital or anything. There's a guy not only a politician but a preacher.

JM: Was he premier at the time, dad?

SM: Oh yes. I drove over to drop her off and I met him right at the door.

JM: So where did she go? She came to our house. We had to feed her and keep her and give a bedroom up.

SM: Six months she lived at my place free of charge. Then she went back to work after, and she couldn't hack it so she quit.

Q: Do you have a pension from your work?

SM: No, well except...

JM: Well we never even covered the part about his later career. He had another career.

Q: Talk about the other career.

SM: I decided that I couldn't do bodywork anymore, it was just too hard and I got tired of it. It changed so much that it wasn't fun anymore. So I quit that and I went out and got a job at Southpark Motors as a maintenance man, work that involved all kinds of stuff. I only got \$800 a month because I wasn't an hourly paid man. But the work that I had to do, I used to have to drive a tractor, scrape the snow off, pile it on a truck, haul it away – I did all that myself. I'd get the boys to move the cars and I'd clean it all up. One Friday, come back Monday morning, snow that deep. Anyway, I built two small houses, I did plumbing, I put up a fence. I painted the inside of the buildings – wash it first and then paint it, because it all had smoke stuck to it. All that. Then he had a cabin up at Pigeon Lake and he'd take me out there for a day or so to do some work. People would bring their car in for repair, they'd need a ride back home. They just sold a car but it needs to be washed, take that car to the carwash.

JM: How many years did you do that?

SM: It was about three and a half or four years. I was still looking through the job things, and one day I saw an advertisement for the automotive department in high school. They wanted somebody with an automotive background. Well I figured, that's me. So I applied for it, it was M.E. LaZerte, and I got the job.

Q: Teaching automotive?

SM: No not teaching - teachers' aide. But they didn't call it teacher's aide; it's a program aide. I wish I would've been teacher's aide.

Q: So now you're an employee of Edmonton Public School Board.

SM: Yes, and that's the pension that I'm getting. So I went in there and worked there for 13 years, and I did everything there. I did maintenance work and all that, but I enjoyed it. They had a body shop school but I was not hired for that, I was hired for the automotive department. They had a teacher in there, him and I didn't get along. Well we got along but he was just an asshole.

Q: Did you know Dmetro Rosiewich?

JM: You know him.

Q: Anyway, so you worked with the kids?

SM: I had gotten a chance and I loved it. And the kids loved it, because they didn't learn anything from the other teachers. Those teachers were just duds; they should've never been teaching.

JM: Not every department, dad.

SM: No, I'm talking about the autobody department. The other teachers I won't touch. But these were in my trade and I knew good from bad. At the end of the year, if they had one guy that went into body work, they were happy. At first, they had one teacher and then they hired another one. But neither one of those teachers were body men, just weren't body men. I never saw them pick up a welding thing or anything.

Anyway, one teacher got sick and the other guy says, hey Steve, I've got a kid here, him and I don't see eye to eye; would you like to work with him? Certainly, so I took him on and I'm showing him the way I used to do it, how it's done. Not the way those guys are doing it. We worked two back fenders, quarter panels we had to fix up. We fixed them up, sanded it down, put a primer over it. That kid was walking around there like a peacock. I was glad for him. He come from a bad background, his mother was remarried. So after that the kids would see me in the hallway, hey Steve, I want to ask you something. They knew that I know what I was talking about. After a while I said, oh go and ask your instructor. They don't know what they're talking about.

But the kids were right. They had a welding exam. How are you going to have an exam when you didn't teach them anything? If I was going to a department like welding or mechanical and I see a kid doing something wrong, I'd go up to him and show him what's the right way of doing it. I'd wonder why the teacher didn't show him. They go cutting a piece of wood, there's a vise here and you put it way over there and you're cutting that with a saw and it's vibrating. Why don't they realize if they get it close to the vise, bring it as close as you can to the vise and it's solid. That goes for metal or wood, same thing. Filing, how to file ...

Q: So those were rewarding years in your life.

SM: Oh absolutely. They changed a little bit and made some welding hammers. They had to pour a thing and then they had to file it and make it round. So, I would show them how, I'd go easy and steady. I worked there for a while, and then I left and worked for another guy, an instructor. He was the guy that got me in there. He said what that kid said to the instructor, you know, oh he's good. I took that course in Winnipeg once in someplace else and then in another school when I was going to body shop, filing and all this hacksaw. They got a hacksaw. They think if they go ziggy they're going to go faster. I said, use the whole blade and you'll be just as fast and a lot straighter.

Q: So, you didn't get any pension from all the years you worked in the auto body business?

SM: No. There was one place, I think it was Edmonton Motors, that they started to have pension. But by then, I had left.

Q: For the whole time you were there, no health benefits?

SM: No, nothing.

Q: Is that still the case?

SM: As far as I know, but I've been retired for 29 years and I was 13 years at the school. Even after the school I volunteered at a young offender centre.

Q: What were you doing there?

SM: Well, woodwork and metal.

Q: Was that the Yellowhead Youth Centre?

SM: Not Yellowhead - out in the west end. They're still there, young offenders. The first day I was there in the metal department doing welding, cutting and stuff. When we were going home a kid come up to me and shook hands and said, I want to thank you for what you taught me today. The kids there from 13 to 17, they could be in there for murder. I found out that there were some good kids in there. There was one kid from up north, and the day he was leaving I said to him, because I worked with him a bit, I said, I don't want to see you here again. He says, you won't. He says, I'm not a bad guy, I got in with some bad company. But he said, you won't see me here again.

Q: How long did you help out at the youth offenders?

SM: Six months. In the paper there I've got the hours down. 870 some hours.

JM: You mentioned that at LaZerte there was only one a year that would choose a trade.

SM: They shut down the body course, they shut it right up, no more. So this guy by the name of Perchok, a Ukrainian, he didn't like that. He said, you know, we should have a body shop here. He come up to me and says, can you give me a hand to get this started again? I said, I'd love to.

Q: Was he a teacher?

SM: He was a teacher. I said, okay, but it's got to be done my way. Oh yes, anything you want. So I had 14 students that they got going there. I'm retired already and I'm going to work every

day like everybody else. I taught them the way I learned welding first of all. First of all, you show them how to open the acetylene and light it up and turn it up to a point. Every one of them had to go through that, and then I started puddles.

JM: We don't need all the details dad. We don't have time.

Q: But the thing is that you got the program restarted.

SM: I got that program started.

Q: And it kept going for a while?

SM: Yes. Then I went to that young offenders. I left in '09, and I came back next year. Perchok says to me, you know those guys that you were teaching over there? I says ya, what about it? He says, six of those guys took up body work, six guys. Almost 50 percent, compared to what they were getting. You see what difference it was in the instructor.

Q: They just have to know that you care about them, too.

SM: Exactly, and I did care. After a while you can see their eyes light up – oh we're doing something good here.

JM: My dad was not formally educated. He had grade 8. He didn't get offered to go to NAIT and get more training, and he decided not to because he had children and a family. But my dad always wanted to be a teacher, and he never got to be a teacher.

SM: But I was a teacher.

JM: Yes, he was a teacher when... But the other wonderful thing is that he got to spend a good portion of his life with people who were educated and appreciated who he was and what he could do. And, he has kept up friendships with the teachers. His very best friend is Keith King, who was a teacher with him at E.M. LaZerte. So, he developed lifelong friendships when he worked with people who had university degrees.

SM: The teachers respected me quite good. Not all of them. There were one or two, but all in all the other people treated me like a teacher. I earned respect from them.

[END]