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(July 17, 2002)

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I was born in the Ukraine during a period of time that there was a lot of sickness. In the community we lived, 100,000 died of internal typhus. It was a year of anarchy. That created a famine. My mother had never let me forget it, because she was not expected to live. So with that I would've never been born. She, however, survived. I didn't have any opportunity for mother's milk or anything like that. My older sister had to go beg for milk in the village, and I became one of those potbellied babies that you often see. I didn't have enough strength to walk until I was more than 3 years of age. So it demonstrates the kind of environment in which I was born. My mother, being a mother, so typical that all the time I was at home, if there was something really good that I liked, after dinner she'd give me another piece. Because I didn't have enough to eat when I was young. My sister I remember very well, pulled me around on a wagon. She fell and broke her collar bone doing that, and she never let me forget it the rest of my life

either. So the impact that it had was like, my mother having some thoughts of purpose, she always said to me there's a reason why you and I survived. We'd better do some good. She never let me forget that. But I think it had an indelible effect later on, on my life. My father had been an expert farmer. And my grandfather was in the duma when the Ukraine was independent for a short period of time, and later on was in the Russian duma. He was really quite influential. As you know I have a Mennonite heritage, and as Protestants we could not interfere with the affairs of state and the Greek Orthodox Church. Mostly the Ukrainians were kept illiterate. When they went to church, they had to stand up. The priest spoke to them in Latin, and then they went home. There was complete control. So what they did, what my grandfather and parents did, and I've got pictures of them – they built schools. Ostensibly it was for Protestants, but they built them and any Ukrainian who wanted to go could come to school and become literate. That stood them in good stead. It's likely one of the reasons they're all alive today. My father was in the First World War. He was in the army when Hindenburg pushed the Russian army into the swamps. He survived that. He later on fought on the Turkish front. If you volunteer, you have a third choice on the home front. So he was in Moscow at the time of the takeover of Lenin. These things of course, I didn't experience. But you almost feel you were there, because it's history that has been indelible in the impact of all those

things. My father always said, give me a war any day rather than a revolution. Because you don't know who you're talking to, you don't know who's gonna turn you in for whatever you said and to what sign. There was a lot of injustice. My Uncle Isaac, who spent 11 years in a labour camp, sent there by Stalin, he described it very well. I may talk about it later on, because I think it's important to correct some history that some people leave behind. He claims that all the atrocities during the war and during the anarchists were really the bandits and the anarchists who just plundered everything. That's why you had, in large measure, the famine, together with the boycott from the west in that regard. I always remember the day when my dad had been here 5 years he made an application for citizenship. He got his citizenship and he found out he was a British subject. He was some peed off, because he didn't want to be an Englishman, he wanted to be a Canadian. We didn't get the Canadian status until 1947. So he said that during the revolution, he would capture soldiers from the west, including the English. He was a commander of a civic army. He would capture them one day, and the next day… They'd fight on both sides. He only interprets that, there was a deliberate attempt to weaken what was later on the Soviet Union. He didn't like that, and he didn't mind saying it either. But those are the kind of background. My mother lost her first husband through TB. She married another Reimer and had a terrible time. To make a living, she made straw

shoes. But they always insisted on education. They always insisted on learning languages. We grew up in an area there where you had to learn 4 languages. We come from the Netherlands and my native language is Flemish. I don't know why anybody wants to keep it, but I can still speak it today. We didn't know what it was until one time I flew on Sabina Airlines to Brussels. They spoke English, and then French, and this language sounded strangely familiar, it's the one we're speaking at home. When we moved to Belgium later on to our international office, I became more aware of what is this connection. It's Flemish. So one day in Canada I met this woman and I was going to talk to her. I said, what language am I speaking? Because they used to call it Low German. Low sounds like it's a lesser language. But actually it was a Netherland language, spoken in lower parts of the Netherlands. There's low German and high German. If I spoke to you in Flemish and you're German, you wouldn't be able to understand it. It helped a great deal. Belgium was only formed in 1860. Before that it was all Holland and called Netherlands before that. So there was a little bit of confusion. So the Russians did not allow Ukrainians to teach Ukrainian in school, it had to be Russian. If you wanted to have a post-secondary education, you had to learn German. Because if you take a look at the map, English did not have much of an influence on countries west of Austria and Germany. We grew up having to learn 4 languages from the cradle. If you

wanted to have an advanced education, you learned German. I still have some of the books, and most of them are in Gothic and whatnot. I've lost most of my Russian, because you can't practise here. Some words would come back once I was there. Our people considered themselves Russian, being Queen Catherine the Great, because the expert farmers had invited them to come to the Ukraine to help develop the agricultural industry. That's the background. I do remember some things. There was a bridge that went over the ? River. The place where I was born is now under water because of the ? trusk, which is a big water dam that's there. But before that, there was a bridge across. It had been blown up during the First World War. One day we heard a big noise. A train was coming down the railroad track. It was a river valley, and here was a big long train going boom right into the river. As a kid, that was pretty dramatic. As I got a little older, I had to tag along with my older brother, who was 7 years older than me. They learned how to use me. I remember this particular episode. They went in one day and asked my mother to give us a pepper pod. I wondered what they were going to do with it. They put it up the rear of a heifer. When the heifer became an antelope awful fast, I'll tell you. Jumped fences… They of course introduced me to many other things at a very young age. There were a lot of rabid dogs, and it was nothing to hang them. There was no SPCA. And of course during a famine you can understand, if there's not enough food for people, there isn't

going to be a hell of a lot of food for animals. Everything was in chaos at the time. Lenin straightened it out. At least by my family he was highly respected. My Uncle Isaac, I translated his writings, he feels to this day, he says I can't prove it, but he felt that Stalin was partly responsible for Lenin's demise. You've heard that before too. But he was there, and that's the feeling they had. They were then going to build the Nepica Trusk, which is a power dam which inundated the town and the land that we lived on. In Russia, each family was entitled to a parcel of land, I forget what they call it. But it was a little bigger than a quarter section. In our case, my mother had inherited a quarter section from her first husband that died. So they farmed about a section and a half, which was a big farm. They had almost an experimental farm. My father told me this story. Everybody had to belong to a union, including the owners and the bosses. In Russia, that's the way it is. The managers are all part of the union. There's no bargaining unit. Everybody who works there. I guess they were instructed to go on strike, so he was on strike with these guys, he walked out with them. They had to come tell him what they wanted. They said to him, the policy of our family, our grandfather and everybody, was whatever they ate on the table, the workers got no less. It was a principle with them. They were not going to have a better plate on the table than the people who worked for them. So this guy says, the shop steward or I don't know what they call him, came to dad and

said, we're not getting enough borscht. Dad says, what do you mean. He says, well we're not getting enough borscht. He says, do you want borscht? Ya, we want it morning, noon and night. Well that's the cheapest food you can give them. So he gave them borscht morning, noon and night. About a week later they came and wanted to go back on the old menu. There are a lot of things like that in the growing up of a country or a totally new…

He cleaned up on the bandits, Lenin did. They stole from everybody, nobody had anything. Things got quite a bit better. Lenin's policy was, if they don't agree with us we'll show them that we can do better. There was no particular hostile attitude to people who may have opposed him, because he had to pull the country together. But after he died, things went downhill. Stalin was a despot. I remember vaguely, I still have the suitcase that my father had for the clothes. It was underneath the bed. So that if they ever came to pick him up, usually between midnight and one, that he could take something along so he would have warm clothing. They never came. But part of that was, with all of them, it's hard for me to express it, but the respect that they had developed in the community. Not a selfish one, one of sharing and doing whatever they could to improve the lot of people in ? and that part of the Ukraine. One story my dad told me was that the anarchists, about 30 of them in a small cellar, that they stayed in for quite a while. The only food they had, there was no toilet facilities, they had to live like pigs. That's not the

way people normally understand it, because pigs all go and do their work in one corner of their pen. It's that kind of a life. So he got pulled out of there between 12 and 1 for a summary trial. They asked him, what are you doing here? He says, you put me here. Well they said, you tell us who put you here and reported you here, and we'll execute him instead of you. My father told them, you've got one choice. Either you execute me or you don't. So they let him go. ? was that kind of community, not many people. I'm very proud of that. My family saved a lot of Jewish people when the Germans came through. Because the first thing the Germans did was round them up. They negotiated this parcel of land, this city, would be not neutral but not involved. Both sides wanted to save that area. They needed it when the war was over, because this was a centre of great productivity and industrial plants. So they got away with it. My Uncle Isaac, who did the same thing when he was mayor of the city when the Germans came the 2nd time and did the same thing. That's why Stalin sent them. He said, you shouldn't have done that, he sent them off to Siberia. So if a guy came and said to dad, it's time you left. We know exactly what that meant. Lenin, however, instead of relocating people who's land was inundated, had given them a fairly good price for the land. Surprisingly, they were satisfied with it. Not that they wanted to leave it, but what can you do if this land is going to be inundated under 40 fathoms of water. So we had that. We left ?, and my dad wanted us

kids to see the Moscow Zoo. But our form of transport is we just crawled into a boxcar. There's stories we can tell about that. Of course, the time came where you crossed the border of Russian and Latvia. He couldn't take much money along, had to leave it there. My brothers and sisters say they want to be respectable, he did it by legal means. I'm not so sure that was always the case. He had sewed some money into dolls. People who were traveling with him, he gave them money. They could keep some of it if they gave most of it back at the other side. That kind of stuff. I don't know if that was legal or not, but they did. He also paid for the transportation of a lot of relatives to come to Canada. I do remember when we went to Latvia, Rega, this was the first time we were now treated as Ukrainian immigrants to Canada. We were deloused. Every boy, girl, man and woman had to stand in line absolutely naked. It's quite embarrassing for some people. My father had enough money, he wanted to make this a real nice trip. He wanted to buy a first class ticket to Canada. Because he was an immigrant, we had to be transported at the bottom of the ship. I remember going through a fuel canal vaguely, and going to the towers of London. Stopped in London and took a train from London to South Hampton to come to Canada from there. On the train to South Hampton, somebody opened the window on the train and my sister Mary got a cinder in her eye. It got red. When we got to South Hampton they said, we don't know if that's dracoma or whatnot. They put us on the

Empress of France and kept her behind. We didn't know if they were going to be sending her back. I had, as you can appreciate, a special bond with her because she had lugged me around. I think the reason the ocean is salty is because I cried all the way across the ocean for her. But we got into Quebec and took a train sitting up to go all the way to Mildon, Saskatchewan. Now we were exposed to Canadian culture. My mother said, well these Canadians are funny. They're always chewing and putting nothing in their mouth. We had never been introduced to chewing gum. We had to come to Moosejaw, and how do you say that in any other language. My father's brother had come to Canada a year earlier, and he was in Mildon and that's where we went. As he came off the train, here he's chewing. My mother says, he's Canadian already. So we stayed there for the winter and my father helped him harvest. In the spring they went out to, 1928, they went out to look for land. They found it between Madison and ?. My father being the agricultural expert, I don't know if he'd be there today, but he'd done his homework. He knew the wind blew from the west, he knew it was semi-arid. So he was looking for soil that retained moisture, and he wanted to farm north and south, because that's where the wind came in. So he got a pretty good parcel of that. A lot of people came to Canada at that time. Like my uncle who we brought over didn't know beans about agriculture. A lot of people from England, some had been musicians, some had been teachers, some had been

bookkeepers. They didn't know anything about agriculture. It particularly applies to a lot of people from England who settled in that area. There weren't too many at that time, because us Ukrainians and Russians were considered a bit naïve. We were particularly encouraged to come to the west because of the Louis Riel rebellion. We didn't even know who Louis Riel was. But the English did, so a lot of them from Ontario and whatnot didn't want to come. There was this kind of unrest amongst the native people. So that helped him. I was lucky. I turned 7 and went to school. That was normally the age we started in Russia. Their what we consider grade 1 to 8, was grade 1 to 6 there. They concentrated more on math. My older brother and sister had completed that. It was sort of hard for them to go to grade 1 with stuff that they knew, so they progressed as fast as they could learn the English language. Particularly my brother. My sister really didn't bother. She was a couple years older than my brother. She was hired as a farm maid. Some were good people, some weren't so good. They just treated her like so much dirty. Others treated her very well. My brother, he was anxious to help my father. He was 15 and decided he was going to not go to school anymore, although grade 8 is all there was. There was no high school. I first remember him, he had the chore of breaking the land. I remember that very well, because we all went out to look. We had a sense of history that here's where the Indians were. There were artefacts out there for Indians. Here's where the

buffalo roamed. We sort of felt things are never going to be the same for us again, nor will it be for that land. I think you have to appreciate the tremendous respect that people from that part of the world where we came from have for land. Owning some land was a dream for most of them. So we broke that land. When we came to Canada, there was a small house on the farm. There were 3 families – my uncle and my aunt. There were 3 sisters that came. My aunt Helen had lost her husband the first year she was here. You can imagine what kind of tough situation that would be in. Two sisters sort of adopted her. When we first came there, there was a small little house and it had to house 14 of us. The first crop we had looked beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful. We were getting the binder ready to go out the next day. Along came a cloud and it hailed everything out in 15 minutes. So that was our introduction into the depression.

In school, we were the only Russian kids that had ever gone to this school, so things were sort of focused on us. Wherever there were other immigrants, there might have been a number of families. As we all know, there were certain names that were special for us, like bohunk and whatever. We were considered to be dumb. Part of that came from an impression that a lot of them didn't have any education, but we couldn't speak the language. So my main concern when I first went to school was, what am I going to do if I have to go to the bathroom? But that didn't turn out to be a problem.

When I went to school, as a matter of fact I looked at the report cards the other day. My parents had kept them, so I have them now. There's a rank in class. We had never heard of the word rank. It could be something that stunk. But what it clearly was, the rank in class, as you know, would be where you stand in your grade. They had that every month. After a couple of months the rank in class, there was a 1 beside me. So it stood that I was first in class. And so were my brother and sister in their grades. There's an advantage that immigrants have, particularly if you're from a minority group. You know you gotta do better. It's instilled in you. You have to be one notch ahead. So when that happened then some of those people who had the prejudices said, how can this Russian kid come in here and after a couple of months beat my Johnny? It wasn't supposed to happen. First of all, you're supposed to be a bit dumb to start with. There was a real consternation in the community about that, and she lost her job. To this day, I've always felt a little guilty. I could've failed. Because she was so very good to us. There were a lot of people who were really good. They helped you along, encouraged you in what you were trying to do and make this your home. However, it was tough when it came down into the '30s. A lot of people were talking about going back. We came from a very beautiful part of the Ukraine, not too far north from the Black Sea. They had fruit trees in every yard. The thing that always amazes me about Russian that they can't feed

their people, there's enough orchards and fruit there to feed every army in the world. It comes clear as you study the country, they don't have the infrastructure. No refrigerators way up north. What do they get up north? They get dried apples, while the apples are laying on the ground and rotting. But nevertheless, it was a beautiful country. And to take a person like my mother, who was a gifted soprano, and plunk her in the driest part of Saskatchewan and couldn't speak the language, is a big jump. She never complained. But there was talk. So one day my father decided we were going to have a picnic. There were some trees on the farmstead. He got up and said a few words, like he usually does, but we always knew he meant them. He said, this is our home. This country was good enough to take us. We're not going to take anything from them, but it's up to all of you to pay back. He never took a spot of relief. He said we're not coming here being a drag on this country and the public. That's what he instilled in us. You gotta pay back. He became very well accepted because he knew farming. Although there was a prejudice when he got a good crop, because he farmed north and south and his land didn't blow. So they charged him more taxes than anybody else because he had the best land, they said. It was like water off a ducks back, he overcame that. He had to take relief one year, and that was seed oats. There was no seed oats to be had. The only way you could get it was to go to the municipality and take relief. Because if you didn't have

oats, you couldn't feed your horses and cows. So come fall he had a crop. He went to the municipality to pay for it, and they wouldn't take his money. He came home pissed off. He said, this is a funny country. You can't even pay for the stuff you get. But that was his character. He was a hard working guy and he was bright. He was a leader, he became a leader.

And he was one of the people that helped, he had community experience in Russia, he's one of the people that helped build the first municipal medicare plan in the province. So we could hire doctors. They were happy to work for a municipality where you paid them a wage. Because the client relationship wasn't worth a damn, because the clients couldn't pay. So we got some of the best doctors out of the University of Saskatchewan. I went with him to help translate, as a teenager, at these meetings. It's surprising how they respected his experiences in these matters. They only paid maybe a dollar or two for a quarter section of land. But a lot of quarter sections make a lot of money, good wage for the doctors. After a while we worked out a process whereby we could take in the villages and not just the farmers. I've said this before, that there's a great tendency to forget this beginning of medicare. A lot of people are under the impression that Tommy Douglas got elected and snapped his fingers and we had medicare. That is not the case. He did that with owning the hospitals in 1944, because they were privately owned until 1944 or 1945. That's the case. But the farmers, immigrants who want to

work together to really lay the foundation of something this country is very proud of. Should be. So the thing started to gel.

He drove a school van, my father did. It meant we had 16 kids in the car sometimes, and he got 4 cents a mile. Then the municipality couldn't pay him, they gave him notes like the teachers. But later on some of the sharpies in business said, we'll recognize that as a down payment for a tractor or whatever the case was.

The depression, I think, should also be remembered with the tremendous ingenuity that the women on the farm had. They knew how to put a meal on the table when they had nothing. They would take pig weed and call it celery. They were browned off because Russian thistle didn't mean a damn thing. If you tried to boil it or anything, it just all dissolved. But they knew how to put a meal. Coffee, we didn't buy coffee, they roasted wheat or flax, or mixed it with barley or whatever it was. And it passed as coffee. I've always wondered why there hasn't been more anecdotal history written of the very brave women who went through the depression. It was very hard for a person like my mother, who couldn't speak English. She's stuck on a farm, how is she going to learn it? Well she knew 6 or 7 languages to start with, so it made it a little easier for her. So when we bought a radio, she listened to

Pepper Young's Family or something like that, and phoned other farm women. What does this mean? So by the time she moved to Saskatoon for her retirement, she could speak English pretty well and could understand what people said. But it was very hard for her. The men went to town and they could socialize. My father drove a van. They stayed in town all day long, particularly during the winter. The horses couldn't go back and forth twice, it would be about 10 or 20 miles a day that the horses had to go. And you had to carry your own load. Before we had the school vans, we went to Madison School. My sister is 3 years younger. When she was 7, she started school. I had a horse by the name of Nellie. She was a wonderful horse, and I was surprised that my father had given me one of the prize horses. But she was a smart one because in a storm you could say, Nellie, take us home. And she'd take you home. I guess that's why we got the good horse. Our parents didn't want us to disappear in a snow bank.

The saddest part of the depression was the two experiences that I had. We all sort of adopted a horse. My uncle Herman, 20 horses and the kids, I wasn't going to do that?? So I picked a horse by the name of Roger. He was a big as an elephant. He got to liking kids. We needed a stepladder to get on him, but he didn't mind. When we came from school, I had to learn to take him uphill a little bit for him to say hello to us. Because as soon as we came there, there

was a waterfall. Let me tell you, he peed a lot. So when we took him uphill it would run down, and wouldn't get muddy. He was very strong. He was sort of like a big teddy bear in some respects. He worked hard but he liked the kids. It was about 1937. At that time horses were put out to pasture on the range. You didn't keep them in the barn. There were usually straw stacks around and they were away from the farm all winter. Well in 1937 there were no straw stacks. The crops weren't big enough to make any straw stacks that would shelter them. There was snow in the winter, so their hooves couldn't stand going through these Chinooks and whatnot, you had to put ice on top of the snow. About 4 in the morning one day I heard a neigh outside. It sounded to me almost like Roger. My father got up and called my older brother. It was Roger. He came home to die. Starved to death. So many horses starved that we had to sell the rest of them in order to buy a tractor. That's when mechanization took place, in 1937. It was so desperate that the animals couldn't survive.

The other thing I remember is my dad shipped some cattle to Winnipeg. He got a bill back from the CPR that the transportation cost more than the income of the sale of the cattle. That put quite a conundrum with my dad. He couldn't afford to keep them, he couldn't afford to sell them. He really loved his animals. He was a hardened bugger. He'd been through war and whatnot.

But there were tears running down his cheeks. He took a rifle and shot them all.

There were experiences, like there were 2 neighbors, two gentlemen who were single. Always very nice. One day they just sat on the running board of a model T car and each pulled out a 22 rifle and they shot each other. You wonder why. Then at school we lost a buddy. He was the son of a butcher. They had decided obviously to commit suicide. This was a very stormy day, dust blowing. They stopped on a highway with their son in the back, and they had the exhaust coming into the car. The RCMP came along and stopped them. The son was dead, our school chum was dead. But the parents survived, even though they were unconscious they came back to life.

Then half a mile away from us there was a railroad track. A lot of the so-called bums came and looked for work. I know that they were in cahoots with the engineers sometimes, because engineers slowed down the train before they went through there. But they weren't supposed to do that, you know. And that's all they wanted, was work. I was just a young teenager. A lot of them hadn't seen their families for a long time, because they were so happy to see us kids. Mother never let anyone go without giving them something to eat, if they wanted it. We had chicken and we had pigs and we had eggs. The eggs, with the grasshoppers, may have made the yolks a little

red. But nevertheless, they got potatoes and those kind of eggs. I heard that they were stopped in Regina and Winnipeg, and some of them shot. As a kid, it seemed so unfair. And it was. I couldn't understand it all, why this would happen in a new country. But like Tommy Douglas said, when they wanted money for the unemployed, the finance minister in Ottawa said, what do you think we can do? Do you think money grows in trees? But when the war broke out, they found the tree and they had all the money in the world to prosecute the war. But they couldn't do it for unemployed people. Then as I got a little older, I heard that ICI, which is CIL in Canada, and selling paint to farmers, had supported the German army and the allied army at the same time. That was really strange to me, that this kind of thing was even allowed to proceed, when these bums were the guys who had crook and whatnot, they were slaughtered. It got me to questioning a lot.

Then of course as we went along, my father and the heritage of the Anabaptists, they take your son aside and my mother and they gave you a real talking to. They say, we brought you this far, and nobody's in charge of your life but you. You develop your own families, your own values, and that's up to you and we'll support you the best way we know how. In other words, they were officially letting go. Of course they believed, also where this Anabaptist thing came in, that there should not be a commitment by

anybody to take a child and channel them to his religion, when they are not old enough to make up their own mind. So whether or not you joined a church, they felt it was up to the time when you had enough life experience to choose what they considered a pretty important step. Neither did they want the state involved and any state churches. It's a history of opposition or a history of challenge, to take on the church and the state at the same time in those days. Must have been a very courageous act. They stuck with it, as only Dutchmen can. So I sweated over that one. He taught me in a hurry that he was serious. He did that after I'd finished grade 12. So I had to make a decision whether I was going to university that year. There's not much time after grade 12 till when university starts. It's a short period of time. My mother had 3 grown men, so to speak, on the farm. She was washing still with a scrub. I wanted her to have a washing machine. I figured if I went to university she wouldn't get one. So when my dad asked me, are you going to university, I said I don't know. He said, I guess you're not going. I got the message, and I stayed home all that one year and figured out ??? I think I come to the conclusion that it all revolves around life, and what you do with it and how you husband it. Whether it's an animal, a tree, or a human being. So I resolved at that time that I would never work for private enterprise, and I haven't. I'll tell you another thing, is that I could never begin to sell my values to my union members, because today it's gone so far. But I've never

made an application for employment in my life. I've been employed all the way through. But I think maybe I was lucky. But maybe employers sensed a certain dedication that is necessary if you're going to start credit unions, cooperatives, and whatnot. I was asked to go and work at the Co-op refinery. CIO had just been born. The workers were excited, cut John L. Lewis was in the CIO. The oil workers were part of the 5 unions that formed it. They had a particular role to play, because MacKenzie King is the father of the company union. The fellows thought maybe the employers had hired me to arrest their energies in forming a union. I don't see how they could ever think that, because I was only 19 years old. But I remember them coming, they were fair enough, and said, are you union? I said, I don't know much about unions, but I don't know why you'd be happy for 35 cents an hour either. Now of course, the kids on board were all afraid of speaking out. Because I wasn't married, they chose me to do some of the uncomfortable things. Coming from a farm, I didn't think there was any bravery involved in it. Because on the farm you said anything you wanted to say. I had a great experience in the refinery. The local at one stage was all CCF, for a period of time they had an executive. The co-op said, trust us, you don't need a union. I figure that the union should be free in its own entity, and should not be secondary to a political party, nor the employer's scheme of things, as much as we may support a cooperative movement economically. We had all the

literature. They made me editor of a paper. My partners were Lloyd… it is a place where Tim Buck used to stay all the time when he came into town. He's a member of the communist party. And Klem Cyberling, who would study 7 years as a priest. When it came to reading editorials, I always wound up writing them, because the 2 could never agree as to what they were. However, it was good education for me. In the control room when you're an operator, every day was a union meeting, 8 hours a day. I wouldn't say there was any hard feelings in those things. Then we also had another guy that was a technocrat. He thought the world would be much better if we were all technocrats. That was a real deal. However, it came down to forming the union. At that time, I think this is important for people to remember, there was no labour code. The federal government had the jurisdiction of labour. They were having difficulty prosecuting the war effort, because there was so many strikes just for recognition. And of course the recognition came at the time you went to the boss and said, hey boss, we got a union. Will you recognize us? It's yes or no. Maybe he wants to think about it for a day to get his troops in order. But generally it was no. So that's where all the strikes took place. It was considered risky to tell the boss that we got a union, so send the kid. He isn't married, he can afford to lose his job, he'll get another one. A fellow by the name of Frank Chappel, he was sort of a father to me, said I'll come with you Neil. So we went. I just thought it was a question of,

here's the cards and we'll have a union. Because that's what farm life was like. You said what you wanted to say. However, that bravery is often akin to naivety. A lot of people who do brave things don't know the consequences of their action, and neither did I. So don't want to pretend at all that I was brave about this, but I realized right away that I was in some trouble. The guy was from Texas. He'd run a plant in Japan, and you know what that's all about. He was about 6'4" and white hair. I learned later on he was a great actor, too. His name was OV Mills. I said, Mr. Mills, I'm here to represent the people. The workers want you to know we've formed a union. He looked at me and his face got read, he looked as if he was very furious. He says, the day I recognize the CIO I'll shut down this plant. There must be another being around, because I never contemplated this. But I said right away, Mr. Mills, we'll spare you the bother. He looked at me, what's this kid trying to tell me? I said, look Mr. Mills. I knew then I was in some trouble. There's a highway there, Frank and I are going out there. We expect and hope that everybody in the plant will come with us. If they don't, we'll keep on walking. On the other hand, if they come out we expect you to… Well let me think about this. So he turned around, he didn't take the chance. I wasn't bluffing. That's what I heard happens. So that's how our local was formed, and it was the first oil workers local of the modern era of the present CEP. I'm going there on the 21st of September to celebrate their 60th anniversary. They've done

very well. They've led the pack. They've got better conditions than any other company in the country. They learned how to bargain. Mind you, the buggers change president every year. I wasn't defeated, I was offered a job as representative of the union. So they didn't have a chance to boot me out of office. But then my wife, we had some strikes that we supported. My wife formed Canada's first chartered lady's auxiliary. I always figured unless you have the home organized you're not going to win many strikes. So she's got a charter that she can hang on the wall with her name on it. They bailed out, the raised money, they went to the picket lines. The brewery workers had a strike, and they really helped them. That experience really helped Mary to organize the women when they formed the New Democratic Party in Alberta. But anyway, she just can't understand why working people shouldn't have a word, so to speak.

I'll go on to tell you a little bit about how I got on staff, and then we can end it. But before that, I left out a story that I think needs to be told. When I went to university, I'd given this a lot of thought. After I finished grade 12 and stayed home for that one year, I was tired of being different. So I thought I'd go along with the stream. It wasn't long, however, that I convinced myself possibly I am different. I took the officer's training course, did everything that the university asked me to do. But when I entered university, they asked

what religion were you. Even thought I had not joined a church, I'm marked down. A lot of people say they belong to the United Church even though they aren't active, maybe their parents are. I marked down Mennonite. It wasn't long there were some terrible articles written about the Doukhobors. Everybody complained about how the Doukhobors should be part of society. Here's some kids coming to get an education, and they write some terrible things about the Doukhobors in the papers. I thought I should defend them. I don't know what gave me the goddamn idea that I could. But I did. So I became the leader of all these groups. What the regulations were, even though you did everything that the university asked you to do and what federal government or labour board asked you to do, that if you were a Doukhobors, a Mennonite, a pacifist, or a conscientious objector, you could not be classified as a student. So university education was barred to these people. There were marches. The first group that supported me was the communist party, on a human rights basis. I had the opportunity to go to the chief justice in Saskatchewan, who also the head of the war labour board. He said he'd take a look at it, but he didn't. He was a bloody drunk, and he saw snakes underneath the bed every night I think. There was no consideration. The university president, who was J.S. Woodsworth, who became later the moderator of the United Church, a great guy, fantastic speech that he made. He inspired me so much about what education was. But he was no help. I

think he had sympathy. There were upset about this. I can't figure out to this day why they would be upset, because we did everything they said. I was taking officer's training, military training and whatnot. What more do they want? But the fact unilaterally, if you declared yourself, the law was that you couldn't be considered a student. That was fought, and I think they changed it later on that if they volunteered for the front lines for the medical corps, they could go to university. But that was after I had left. I had an offer to go and work at the co-op refinery. I went to see my professors and said, look, I think it's unfair they're going to kick us out half way through a term. It's money we had to raise, which is hard to raise in the depression, before our education is all gone. Will you at least pass me? Every professor said, we will, but we can only give you a D. I said, well that's something. So there was a lot of sympathy for the students. Strange enough, I still get Xmas cards from a lot of them that I haven't seen since 1942. The place where I was staying was the mother of a former governor general. He was a Conservative and she was a very charming lady. I said, I'm going to get a letter here and you just return it and say I'm not here. But it came before I left and a read it. They wanted to send me to some kind of labour camp. I should've made a photocopy of it. The labour camp is where you send the Japanese and that kind of thing. I went home for Xmas and told my dad. I took the train and found employment at the co-op refinery. Again, I think it's

a history of prejudice that people have that just shouldn't exist. The Dukabores all left, never came back. They not only did damage to the people there and their reputation in my view, but they hurt these people for life. I did okay. But a lot of these other people did not have a father who talked to me and said, you gotta have your own values. Nobody's in charge but you. Our local wsa formed. At that time it was United Oil Workers of Canada, local 1. They formed a national union. But they found out organizing in the oil industry, it was later than the war years, where you couldn't make a speech and a lot of people would come and join the union. Cosden was good at that, but he wasn't good on a one on one. Cosden was our first director. He was a colourful guy. He had one eye that was a glass eye. He took it out every night, he was Scotch, and put it on his wallet for it to watch his money. He had been fired. But anyway, I learned that the labour movement wasn't just all very generous, as well. We had 1,000 members in Canada. When they joined the international union, one company joined down, they weren't going to deal with this. So we were down to about 750, which is nothing. You couldn't build a union from that. So most of us kids who worked in refineries were farm kids. We had what we called a mid-west council that we formed with all the locals in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. We met in Winnipeg. Cosden was going to come down. He came the 2nd day. We said, what do we tell the guy? He'd hired 5 or 6 representatives who knew beans

about the industry. But anybody, who's going to come and work for you if you have not even 1,000 members? One fellow in Montreal too the attitude the Americans like to have this kind of thing taking play with internationally sort of thing. So we said, we'll tell him we'll do our own bargaining. What we need is organizing, that he should put all his staff on organizing. Part of it of course was our own agenda, because we were embarrassed at their performance on the bargaining table, because they didn't know the industry at all. We said to him, Alec, when he came in we had a meeting. They elected me as chairman of the group. I said, Alec, we want to tell you that we're prepared to do the bargaining, save the effort. We're not going to make any impact on the industry with what we've got organized now. Assign your staff to organizing, bringing people into the union. Well he got peed off. He says, we have 1,000 members, and there ain't one of you fit to be a representative. I says, nobody's asking to be a representative. We just want to carry our load so we can build this union. The next day we were going home, he stops me at the door and says, I've spoken to the international president and I have the authority to hire 3 people. I wanted to know if you would come on staff. I said, Alex, I heard what you said yesterday, so why would you want me? And I went home. But he was persistent, I should've read the signs. He was persistent. Finally after about a year I called the fellows together and said, we're not going anywhere, what do you think?

They said, we'll support you, you go and take that job and see what happens. I had two assignments right off the bat. Without letting me know, he moved me to Edmonton. They'd had 6 representatives here before and nobody was able to organize anything. So he sent me to Brandon, Manitoba. In Manitoba there was an anglo-American refinery. There was only one member left in it. I talked to him, and he was a pipe fitter. And this guy Christian, who owned the plant, didn't de-certify or anything like that, because he'd call a meeting and say this is negotiations, he'd appoint a negotiating committee. And then 5 minutes they had an agreement. He pretended there was a union in there. This pipe fitter says to me, he's got a secretary in there and she's been part of the problem. He says, she blackmails. So one time I was asked to go and unplug the toilet in the office. It was plugged with French safes. She's the only woman there. So what she did, clearly, was she got a CLC rep, she would then go and say we'll blackmail you and phone your wife and that sort of thing. Crazy things. But anyway, he says, there's another guy like me that will help you. He gave me the name. A very interesting character. He worked in the refinery and he had been a prisoner of war in Japan, Hiroshima. He survived the atomic blast, because he was under pinpoint, him and a Dutchman. A building fell over top of them and it didn't crush them. When he got out he said, you wouldn't believe what you saw. They thought they may be dead because it looked like another world they were in. He says, the

stench, and he told a real story about his experiences with that atomic bomb. I said to him, you can't keep this story to yourself. At that time the papers had a Sunday edition with an enclosure where they had articles once a week, weekend edition. You remember that, I think. I got back about a year later and here he is telling the story about being under pinpoint in an atomic blast. He was radioactive. But he went to work and we got the union back. So it takes a break here and there, or to find the people that might be able to do it. I was sent to Edmonton. I also had signed negotiations in Saskatoon, the highway refinery. I grew up awful fast I guess. I couldn't really understand why the staff and the committee had gone along with a company. A fellow by the name of Charlie Hay. He used to be CEO, most companies, Gulf as well. He would sit with the committee. He would not pay the wages of a committee in bargaining. But then he knew exactly how much money the union had and when they ran out of being able to pay their committee, they would adjourn until they had more money. So this way he dragged it out over the years. I came into the first negotiations and said, Mr. Hay, I wanna tell you something. This is Monday morning. The proposals that are before you, you've been through 1000 times. There's no use in us explaining them to you. We're gonna have an agreement by Friday, or you'll be struck on Saturday. Well he says, we have our vice president coming in to do the negotiations from here on in. He bowed out. Well we didn't have an

agreement on Friday. I was going to say, next day there's a headline: Labour boss lays down the law, or something like that. Here in one week I've come from a refinery operator to a labour boss. That's how the press always categorizes. Anyway, I told the guys to put the strike notice on the president's door. I hadn't even read our constitution. To me, taking a strike vote is raising your hands. There was 3 or 4 that voted against the strike. But just then one of those 7 reps come walking in. He said, Neil you can't do that, it has to be a secret ballot, and you have to explain to them that it has to pass ¾ of the vote in order for them to get strike benefits. I said, we'll have a secret ballot, and I'll tell you something. It'll be unanimous now. It was. That was my first experience as a labour boss. We came to Edmonton and in Edmonton the international union, I hadn't been here a week, wrote me a letter and said, who have you signed up? I said, for god's sake, I haven't even got my wife here yet and got a place to live. But I never got an indoctrination, I was never told what the policies were, I didn't even know what the wages were. I took a wage cut to come on staff, which is neither here nor there. I had decided that money was not going to be my motivating factor in my career. I need enough to feed a family, but I wasn't out to get rich. All my career, the job I left in the refinery paid more than I've ever received. But I forgot to mention, Dave, that I had organized as the president of the union some of the Imperial Oil marketing. Imperial Oil met with the

co-op. I don't know why they thought I was such a threat to them. They said, do whatever you can to keep this guy from going on staff with the international union. The manager came and said to me, Neil, we've got great things in mind for you. We're gonna promote you so you can become the plant manager. We'd like you to stay. I said to him right there and then, you've just made up my mind, I'm going. I can't understand why they want to go through such a rigmarole to keep me from going on staff of the international union. United Packing House workers were here, and then the ? and the Miner's Union. I organized Liquid Carbonic, so this gave me one voice, one vote both in the federation and the labour council.

[2a/3a tape]

….labour was the industrial union here. They all treated me as if I was a king. I wondered why. What the buggers had done, they were going to elect a secretary treasurer for the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour. They were tied, 17/17. So whoever I voted for was going to become the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour, which proves to me one vote can be important. So I voted for Roy Janna, because the United Mine Workers were collapsing because of the gas coming in and packing house workers were, in my view, a good union too. It was a hard decision, I didn't know either one of them, but that's the way I voted. My wife went to a welcome party in the

block we lived in. They all were there and Mary is there. They welcomed here there. Then they said, who does your husband work for? She proudly says, the Oil Workers International Union. That's the last time she was invited to coffee. We thought in some respects we've come to a different world when we came to Alberta. With that I think we can start a new chapter later on.

On reflection, there's certain things I wanted to touch on. Because I think it tells the complete story about immigrants. You've often seen in going through Saskatchewan there were big barns and small homes. You often wonder if they put the animals ahead of their families. But there's a good reason for that. The place where we went to, my father and my uncle bought a section and a half of land. It was typical what they did, the broke a quarter section so you can start some grain, and they built a big barn. Because if you're an immigrant and you haven't got a penny and you haven't got a horse or a plough, how are you going to get started? So they put the essentials on the farm and soaked you for the land that was remaining. It was made easier for an immigrant to buy those kind of lands, because they could start farming right away. In our case, there was a section and a half of land. So maybe half a section had been broken, and the rest was virgin soil. They had bought it from the Hudson's Bay Company. As you know, Hudson Bay

Company, at one stage of the game, owned all of Canada. In a settlement with Britain, they got every 36th township, and every township has 36 sections. People came in, Americans in particular, that's why baseball is so prevalent in southern Saskatchewan, bought the land and put a fence around it. Bought it for $6 an acre, sold it to people like us for $42 an acre. That's 7 times the price, at about 12% interest. It was designed that you'd never pay for it. But anyway you'd get started. In our case, the partnership broke up early and we got all the land that hadn't been broken before. We built our own homestead, our own barn and house. The house that my dad got was one that was already discarded. It was just a hulk. They moved it on. It was difficult moving, in many ways. You had to have quite a few horses to pull it on the wagon. Us kids slept upstairs. Our stairway was very elegant. We put 2x4s across the studs and climbed up and slept up there. There was no insulation in the house at all, and it gets pretty cold in Saskatchewan in the wintertime. We could see the frost coming through the nails in the roof and whatnot. That's the way we started. Eventually, it took a lot of effort, we all finally insulated the home after a couple of years. But nevertheless, you would like to snuggle up in bed, even if it is your brother. The only heating was a coal stove downstairs. Fortunately, heat rises, so we got some warmth upstairs as well. The immigrants who came, and it doesn't take much imagination, hard to start farming if you have nothing. You haven't got a

horse, cow or anything. So that was provided. Good salesmanship for it to get started. We had pretty good land. A number of things, though. Even though things were tough, we developed our own entertainment. We developed our own games. But I realized as a kid how Canadians really love sport, and excelling in sport was a shortcut to becoming accepted. I remember one time, of course the only thing we could have in those days, that the school boards could afford, was a football that you could kick around. So we were playing another team. I took the football from almost our goal and it went straight through their whole team and scored a goal. Well nobody was more surprised than me. But everything was working, you know. Everybody cheered, and they were cheering for me. I represented the school. I was as tall as I am right now, at age 13. I was very good at track and field, brought home the marbles for the school. It was really that minorities and whatnot, if they excel in something, it builds ??. It reminds me of the Negroes in the United States. When Jackie Robinson became a damn good baseball player, all of a sudden the Negroes were all better, weren't they? They benefited from it because he became a star. There were a lot of humorous things that went on. One of them was when we had threshing, the people who made a contract of threshing their stook and whatnot, they wouldn't eat at our place because we were Russian and obviously we didn't know how to cook. So we had paid a couple of pennies a

bushel more for threshing, and they went 6 miles back to their own place and came back after eating. It wasn't too bad, because it was easier on my mother. But one day it rained, and you couldn't move, because that was gumbo soil. So mother cooked them a meal. Then the hired people wouldn't go home. They liked the food. My mother cooked better than what they were given by their boss. We got quite a charge out of that.

The conflicts were there. For example, a German was unhappy with the grades he was getting with his grain. So he says to this elevator man, shit in the hand and go into hell. Well the elevator man didn't like that at all. But what shit means in German is to pour it in the hand, and hell means light. Pour it in your hand and go into the light. But this guy figured this immigrant was pretty smart, talking to him in that way.

My mother, when my younger brother was born, he was cranky. The fellow from the U.S. we bought the land from said to my mother, what's the matter with Albert today? Oh she says, he's just a bit crazy. She thought crazy meant sick. But he never lived that down all his life.

Then one time a rolly man used to come around and sell things to you. Again, it was one of those things that happened during a rain. It rained while he was there and there's no way he could move. They had to wait till morning. We fed him, he slept there, fed his horse. Then in the morning when he leaves he says to the hired man, don't work too hard. My dad took

him aside and says, how dare you say that? He says you know, we fed you, you slept here, we bought products from you, and then you tell my man not to work. So much for the idioms.

Then of course the hired man went and relieved himself in the barn. That was a gross sin, because where we came from, the barns were attached to the house, and you never did such a thing. They kept it as clean as the house. For you to relieve yourself in a barn was something he just about got fired for. But those were the kind of customs that people had to get used to.

But there's also the hardening process. The first 10 years we were in Canada, we had the drought, we had the hail, we had the soft fly, the rust, grasshoppers, frost, gopher infestation. As kids, we set the trap for gophers and we got 2 cents a tail when you went and sold it at the municipality. But what was really happening is that the gophers were throughout the sections of land that were there, and the farmers were breaking them up and they had less and less room. So no question they did damage to their crops and made hills and whatnot. But it was impressive, to me anyway, that on the farm and the college of agriculture, the tremendous genetic advances that they had made for the farmers. They developed solid stems so the soft fly couldn't. They developed rust-resistant wheat. They had the crops not grow so tall. Like red fife was a tall plant and didn't grow that high, but it kept the

hardness of the head and whatnot. To me it was tremendously impressive what they could do with genetic engineering amongst wheat, taking the good qualities of one grain and were drought resistant, and planting it. I was a part of a youth farm club. I think when I was in grade 10 I won the plot in the municipality. With that you had an opportunity to go one week to the University of Saskatchewan. It was quite a week, because I'd never been to a city before. As we drove down the road to Saskatoon, there was the Besbero Hotel in 1937. I figured there was smoke coming out. I didn't know why the hell they would have smoke in the summertime coming out. But that's steam, as you know. That was the biggest building I'd seen in my life. Maybe I'd seen them bigger, but not that I could recall, certainly in Canada. They assigned some of the best profs they had to the young kids there, and it was really quite an impressive show. One of the things I remember that I learned there was, and the farmers didn't know, you didn't really need a rooster for a chicken to lay eggs. Most of the farmers kept enough roosters around, thinking they needed them to lay eggs. All they did was fertilize. They told us to have the eggs it's better not to even be fertilize, to get rid of the roosters. Just inseminate the eggs you want for brooding. When I told that to my brother, he couldn't believe that. Mind you, those roosters all gave us sex education on the farm. It doesn't take much imagination after a while, why are they chasing all these chickens all day long. But anyway on a farm, as

you know, sex education is fairly easy to teach. You see the kittens having babies and the calves being born and whatnot. I remember that castrating a stallion was a big job sometimes. You had to hobble him and knock him over and whatnot. Finally one guy come along and he wanted to castrate this stallion that we had. Of course we felt it was a big job. He says, oh no, he picked me, all I need is you. Well how you going to do that? He went into the barn and put a tourniquet on the stallion's nose, and I just had to hold it. It's very painful for them. He just walked underneath and removed his testicles. I learned there that a bigger pain overcomes another one. It's good in human relations too. Somebody bitches at you, give them a bigger pain. But anyway, it was amazing how easy the job was when people didn't really know that.

I became interested in cement. Why, I can't tell you. But it was fabulous. There was a dean of chemistry in the university, Torvelson was his name. I read articles in the paper that he had made alkali resistant cement. The 25th St. Bridge in Saskatoon was given a 25 year life span, because they used rust resistant cement to build the bridge. I walked over there. When I had that one week at university, I asked the profs whether or not we could have this Dean Torvelson talk to us a little bit about cement. I found out that the way the farmers were using cement wasn't very strong, it wasn't the right way. You should make it dryer, and stones in it, not just the sand, and tamp it. The

municipality had a culvert making business and they wanted to have capital expenditure to have more forms and whatnot. Because they could only use one form every day or every other day, because they made it so wet. I told them I wouldn't need that, I would only need one form for every size. I quoted them a price. So I got the job of making culverts for the municipality at about 17 years of age. I made enough money there to pay myself through university. It wasn't much, but $100 was a lot of money at that particular time. I think my room and board was $19 a month or something. So I estimated that $300 would do me for the year. It was exactly right, because I took my girlfriend out for a show on the last day, and I had to sell my books to get home. Nevertheless, it was quite a study in that respect.

My brother and I also had a competition for a bushel of grain. What you did is the seed farmers would have a competition in Saskatoon. Then the world competition would be in Chicago. He did most of the work but I helped him when I was not in school. By golly, there are a lot of kernels in a bushel of wheat, let me tell you. We had no rules or regulation that was given us, we were just going to enter. We didn't know that the seed houses polished the wheat. We felt the wheat should be shown the way it was grown. That's what we did. We took the piebalds out, we never polished it or anything. A piebald is wheat that ripens when it's still too green. The sun is too hot and it's got a lot of moisture, so it turns a little yellow. We came within 25. So our sample

was sent, top 25, was sent to Chicago. Here we are in a world competition, not doing any of the fancy stuff that anybody else does. We didn't win anything in Chicago, but if I remember correctly, 36th on the world scene isn't bad for a couple of farm kids taking the wheat raw off the land. It was good wheat, and it was the heaviest wheat that was there. I think 67 lb to the bushel, that's what it weighed. Well number one wheat is only 60 lbs to the bushel.

Part of the background is there was entertainment that we had for ourselves, games we played. My father taught me to play chess ever since I was 8. He played the military chess, which is very aggressive. They move the 1st ? two. Then of course, if you know your chess, if you have the 1st two moves, you pretty well develop the style of the whole game. My father wasn't the kind of guy to let his son win. I'd gotten good enough I could beat my older brother and everybody else, but he had me intimidated. I think I played him for 13 years. In the 13th year I got smart. I said, this fellow is so aggressive, I'll out-aggressive him. And I beat him. He never played with me again. In Saskatoon there was Doctor Russel. He said, beginners come out and learn chess. So I registered as a beginner because what the hell, did my dad really know chess? Obviously he did. He had a puzzle there he gave to me and said, black wins in 3 moves. I told him black didn't win at all, it was a draw.

He says, I'll show you. I showed him. He said, what are you doing here? So he took me to the university club and to the city club, where you had a pyramid. You played 2 games a day. Once you had to defend your position, and the other one you had to move up. I moved all the way up on it. We'd practise all kinds of things. We used to play blindfolded, see how far we got. To do that, you have to be in really good physical and mental shape. It takes a lot of energy to do that. I could play 12 people at one time. It sounds more impressive than it really is. We got to play Manitoba, and I was drawn against a guy who became a world master. We drew him. He came to Saskatoon and played 20 of us. I was fortunate enough to draw him. If you're skilled at the game you see the combinations. It's a game of concentration really. It's not that you're smart or anything, you have to be able to concentrate. So the old man was likely a little better than I gave him credit for in that regard. We played musical instruments and that kind of thing.

But the day came, like I said before, where I went to work in the refinery. There, of course, if you were a beginner, and the more education you had the worse you got treated, to see if you had the stuff. For a long time, every plant manager had started at the bottom. It meant you were talking to a guy who knew your job, which was really good for labour relations. They were conscious of what shift work meant, changing around. But the industry

developed so fast that they couldn't discontinue that. People who had an engineering degree started in a labourer's job. The demand for skills became quite high. After a couple of days, I was to start on the midnight shift. I was to be at a certain corner and they would pick me up. I felt I was on time, but I may have been one or two minutes late. They had left me. They weren't going to wait for any guy who was coming on the shift for the first time. I didn't know what to do. I can't quite remember, but I think one of the fellows that stayed at the boarding house where I was took me there. So I got to the refinery, it was about 6 miles out of town. I wasn't that late, but everything was locked up. They had put a fence around all these essential industries for security reasons. I said, how the hell do I get in here now? I looked around and I thought there was a place that I could crawl underneath the fence. So I did, but when I go there, there was a guy with a shotgun to my head. A fellow by the name if Ridley, pretty excitable. Well he made me quite excitable too. He said, well I was expecting you, because I knew there was supposed to be an extra guy coming on shift. That was my first introduction to the job. You laugh about these things afterwards.

The whole thing of course that I also experienced when I first got there, I met my love, Mary. The landlady had told me that she was already engaged, that I should leave her alone. I said, I'm not here to bother any girls, I'm here

to work. But it seemed like we had an instant communication. We were 2 kids from the rural area, trying to make a go in the city. I had 2 other brothers, only room for one of us 3 on the farm. The economic farm units were getting bigger and bigger. So I got a bit of a cold or flu and a couple of days I was gone, and she brought me chocolate and whatnot. She's pretty nice. But I had no money to take her out. Our first date we went to have coffee together, but she had to pay for the coffee. I haven't lived that down to this day. But to me, starting at the refinery, and we bought a house, was a start, as far as I was concerned. To her that was her dream, having a little house and maybe a family. She's gone for quite a life experience, being a union rep, head of a union, leader of a party. She had to take whatever claim together with us, the hardships and the price you pay for these kind of changes. They meant huge changes for her, more so than they did for me. Because my grandfather had been involved socially and economically and politically. But not her parents. Her father was 14 years old when he came to Canada. He got a job on a railway between Winnipeg and Churchill, and he became the rum runner. There was prohibition in those days, but you can't put a 14 year old in jail. So that's what his job was, and he got picked up every once in a while. But then he went to homestead with an axe and an ox or a horse. The trees there were as thick as hair on a dog's back. He cleared a quarter section. He married my mother-in-law. She was pregnant and there

was an illness. The nearest hospital was Winnipeg. So he took her to Winnipeg on the train. The baby died. In order to pay for the doctor, he had to sell that quarter section of land and start all over again. He never went to see a doctor in his life after that, and he lived to be 100. Maybe that's the reason. When he was 80 or so, the Carrot River ran through his farm. His grandkids were coming down to toboggan down. He decided that he was going to show them how to toboggan down the hill, standing up on a toboggan. Well he went ass over teakettle and broke his hip. The doctors figured he was worthwhile saving, and they sent him to Saskatoon. He was in the hospital for about 2 weeks. He came home and Mary and I visited him. He says to me, Neil, he says, Jesus Christ we got a good government. He says, ya we have a real good government. I said, what makes you say that? Farmers usually complain about the government. He says, well I was in the hospital for 2 weeks, and they let me go, they never even charged me a quarter. That was his first experience since that one, so it's quite a medicare story I think. Speak of medicare, my mother, when she'd get labour pains, they bedded her down in the back of a box wagon sleight in the dead of night, pitch black, and had to go 20 miles to the hospital. But she was so impressed, the ladies in Liston gave her a layette for the baby. She says, they didn't even know me. She remembered that all her life. That's just how kindly they had treated her. But those were pre-medicare days. It's good for

people to understand that things weren't that easy. A lot of people, undoubtedly, had an early death because they couldn't get to the hospitals.

Mary and I never had a car. We bought a little house in Regina on Garnet Street. A 4-room house – kitchen, living room, bathroom, and 2 bedrooms. It was a nice little house and she was quite happy. We'd been there not quite a year and I decided to work for the union. She wasn't exactly thrilled, because we had to pack up and go to Edmonton. The experiences that we've had in Edmonton we've shared together. She has supported me in most everything I did, sometimes with a little reluctance. Particularly the time I was running for the congress as secretary treasurer. She didn't want me to have that job at all. But anyway, in a couple of years we'll be married 60 years. I always told her right from the beginning, that if it comes to bust-up I'm not moving out. She's got to decide. Well she said, that's my story too. It isn't that things have been that easy, but we've made a lot of friends and acquaintances, and I'm glad she's that well accepted in the community. We had the 2 kids. Jan was an easy kid to raise. To me there was an extremely independent young girl, from the day she was born. You'd show her how to tie her shoes, and that's the last time you'd tie her shoes. She'd say, no I'm gonna do it. A very good, caring daughter, but extremely independent person. I think likely you sense that anyway. She's got her own 2 kids and they're wonderful kids. Greg, he's

a cabinet maker. But he says he's found out since he's been married why he went and got the trade. He's a journeyman, he makes wonderful stuff, but he doesn't fit in the industry. Because there they want production, and it became very dangerous. Even thought the inspectors came along and they have the guards on these machines, which are very skilled. But he got a sliver up here and it could've gone in his stomach. One day he came home, in his 3rd year apprenticeship, and he was very upset. Because the boss came around to him and said, who the hell do you think you are? Michelangelo? He was very proud of the fact none of his work ever came back. So when the boss came around and said, who the hell do you think you are, Michelangelo, he was deeply hurt. Mary and I understood, we didn't laugh. But what are you gonna tell a kid? What should he do? Do a sloppy job? But he didn't like the construction environment, working one winter but not the other. He does wonderful work. He's now in the computer business and doing quite well. His wife is working for Emco and likes her job as well. They don't have a family, I don't expect that they'll have one. But they got a dog and 3 cats. I tell them that's quite a trade.

Well Jan, I'll tell you an experience she had. She took nearly 3 years out to work her way around the world. She had tremendous experiences that way. She came home, she sent me money that she earned, she came home with more money than she had when she left. The way that happened was that I'd

promised her that I would buy her a trip when she graduated. She wanted to go after grade 12. I said, don't you think it's better for you to have your degree first of all? You'll have a better understanding of what you're going to see. So she agreed with me. But for her graduation when she got her BA in social studies, I bought her a round trip to Rome, Italy, because I thought she'd be interested in the history. It's a tremendously impressive city for history. Caesar's Ways and the Amphitheatre and whatnot. I've been there a number of times. It's one thing to read about it all, it's another thing to see it. But then the oil crisis came on, remember in '75 or something like that? I didn't really know what the heck was happening, it didn't make sense to me. There was a tremendous hysteria in the world. So I said to her, if you can't go to Europe and you wanna go around the world, why don't you go the other way? Well you know her, the next day she's studying Japanese. She picks up languages very easily. So she decided to go through Japan. She bought a one way ticket to Perth, Australia. Her mother says to me, you're some dad. She says, you buy our only daughter a one way ticket to the farthest point on the globe. I says, there's phones if she's in trouble. You shouldn't have done that. What's she going to do when she gets there? I said, she'll find her way. So she got an old Volkswagon, drove up the river to Darwin. I guess it was in 1975 where the tidal wave destroyed Darwin. She was representing the aboriginals. She wrote us a letter one time. She says, to

think that the recommendation I will make to the judge is going to affect those aboriginals the rest of their lives. Aboriginals can't live legally in Australia. There's always a reason why they can pick them up anywhere and charge them. So my own impression is that the judges liked her, because she gave them hell every time about the plight of the aboriginal people. But the judges always felt they were bound by the law. I think they went along with her, but when I tell her this she says, you don't know what you're talking about. She had no truck or trade, they were part of the system. That was so rotten for the aboriginal people that she couldn't tolerate that. But then the town blew down. We have pictures, only the toilets were standing in places. Totally destroyed. She had studied civic government. She had the opportunity of being part of a team to look after the people that were displaced, and to reconstruct the city. What a break for a kid who's interested in municipal government. She was in charge of locating the 20,000 people there were in the city all over. She put up a network so they could communicate with each other. I remember we received a letter from a family telling us that they don't know what they would've done except for this 20 year old that we sent them. She developed a strong reputation with the Australian job that she'd done. Of course as you know, she's not afraid to make a decision. Fortunately, she's generally right. She went to New Zealand, to Indonesia, of course Japan, Thailand. She got all kinds of skills

in cooking and making materials in a lot of these countries. She loved India, and that island Ceylon, what's it called now, Sri Lanka. She says if they would just have peace there, it's a bit of heaven. She then had been gone for nearly 3 years. There's a couple that was driving back to Germany so they went through Afghanistan, Turkey, all those countries. She can't understand how poor the people in Afghanistan are and still survive. There wasn't any wood even to make any fire. And to have war with these people, it's incredible that they survive, from the stories she tells. And it's cold there in the winter, too. They're tougher than nails I guess. Then they came to Germany and after 3 years in the Orient, she couldn't stand the cultural change there. She didn't particularly like the northern Germans. So she decided to go home. Surprisingly enough, I'm taking a plane from Toronto and there she was. I missed her a lot when she was gone. So she got a job as a neighbourhood improvement officer in Calder. I remember her coming home saying, geez dad, I've got good hours. I says, baloney you have. That's all on paper. Once you deal with people, you'll be on call 24 hours a day. Anybody thinks that there are hours involved when you're dealing with people, just hasn't been through it. But then Betty Hughes got a hold of her and whatnot. She had become quite popular with the seniors. They looked upon her as almost their daughter sort of thing, it was that age group. She defended the seniors in City Hall. To hear her tell the story, she made a lot of

representations to City Hall. She claims a lot of the aldermen fell asleep while she was there. She decided she could do that too. However, she always consults me, but it's never with a lot of notice. She phoned me at the office and said, dad, I need to talk to you. I says, well do you want lunch? She says, no I gotta talk to you right now. She says, they're asking me to run as an alderman, what should I do? I said to her, Jan, that's your decision. But let me tell you that most people who run for the first time lose. There's more people running for civic office in Edmonton that lose than win. So you have to be prepared for a loss. But I said, I like you the way you are. Just because you lose, I don't want you to change your perspective about people and the way you treat them with dignity. But if you can do that…

[Tape 3B, side A]

…and do that, you'll never regret the experience. She says, that's all there is to it? I says, that's what I think. She says okay I'm running. She was an easy sell. But the first time, there was another one with the Urban Reform Group that wanted to run as her partner, and Jan was 23. She's a professor from the university. She didn't want to run with Jan at all, because she figured Jan in her youth was a liability to her. But Jan got elected and she didn't. So that's how she got involved in civic politics. She worked very hard on her job.

We're really quite proud of her accomplishments there. She's still working. I think she's still peed off at the press, because when they caught her she will never be called back.

All told she was there 15 years, and 6 years she was mayor.

To me it's sort of been interesting, how easy it was for her to get there. But what we did in an election was that I was her campaign manager, we made sure that in Calder we picked up everybody. Never mind what the tics were, I knew she was going to get 75% of the vote because of the work she did there. Once you build up a lead in any area, then you just have to break even in the rest of the constituency. That's what happened, so she got elected the first time out. But we knocked on every door, 2 or 3 times the first time. People treated her very well. She was a surprisingly easy sell related to the constituency.

Oh they were mean and cruel. They manufactured issues. Jan had about 60, 65% support of the women, and maybe about 40% of the men. There was an element that the caterer and whatnot could never get used to the idea that the woman was mayor. She was the first one and had to buck that. However, I think where she is respected so highly by the women, is that she never ran to be the first woman. She ran on her program. Labour wise, I think Shirley Carr ran more to be the first woman. Then what do you do when you get

there? They created this appointment. But Jan is known for the thorough and ethical job that she did. She never argued about the gender thing. Those arguments didn't come from her.

Issues around business, which were a total lie. You don't have to be a genius to know that any healthy community has healthy businesses. She built the Edmonton economic committee and all that. All the things the Smith gets credit for comes from her. The river valley preservation and policies and whatnot all came from her stewardship. But Smith, some of the meetings really were scary about the venom that poured out of some of these people that they charged up. I could never figure out why anybody could be really angry with her in that way. But she's still making her contribution. She built the Senior Friend League, which is now a national organization educating people as to the needs for seniors. Right now she's provincial coordinator for the women's shelters, and has had considerable success in changing it. It's a sad story. She says that for every woman they can help, they have to turn 2 away. You don't know where all this venom is coming from in our society. But she says some women go outside just in their night clothes. They haven't got a thing, they haven't got a penny. So what do you do for them? Just as an example of how innovative she is, she heard that good furniture is being taken to the dump. Somebody gets kicked out, they just take their furniture out to the dump. So she went to the people in charge of the dump and said

they'd build a tent and save all that furniture so these women can go and pick it up. So these are the kind of things that make a difference.

But women abuse costs the medicare system in Canada $1.8 billion a year. Unless we deal with some of these social failures that we have that are dumped onto medicare, we'll never straighten it out. I can't either see how we have like the 3 tenors, political tenors of medicare. Romano and Mezankowski and whatnot. I don't know what Romano is going to say, but nothing in the reports deal with the staff. Well my experience in dealing with labour relations for most of my life, is the companies that do the best is those that recognize the union and have the cooperation of the union and the morale of its employees. I can't see any medicare improvement unless they get the people who work for them behind those changes. How else you gonna do it? We have all the reports, who's finally going to do it? The people who know the jobs the best are the people who do them. It isn't some buy who's got his BSc degree or he knows how to take an appendix or something like that. It's the people who do the job. I've had a lot of experience in that regard. One company was going to go under and they decided, they wanted rollbacks. I said, you're not going to get any. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll set up 2 qualified people and you set up 2, and let the chips fall where they may. If we're at fault, the union, then you got a reason to come and have rollbacks. But if we're not, then I said you have to take the brunt. Well that

went all the way to the top. Half of management either quit or lost their jobs because the union was going to have to say something about the operation in saving the company. CEO came on my side. You know something? The Petrocan plant here, it was Gulf at that time, it was a brand new, state of the art refinery. They came and talked to the boys there. Their suggestions saved them $5 million a year. Wherever they went they said, it's time they asked. So they gave us one of the managers that was known as the best manager Gulf had out in BC. So they went there and there was a heat exchanger. The write-up was that it only cost $5,000 a day to run. That's peanuts in a refinery. It costs millions a day. Somebody forgot a zero, it was $50,000. Well the guy said, hey that's different, we can save a lot. They were so successful that they became more productive and we got a raise increase instead of a rollback. But I guess I got a break because the CEO felt that was the way to go. But he was one of those guys made a CEO who had come up the ranks from the bottom.

First of all, I worked in it. In the Co-op refinery, Imperial and BA and whatnot did everything possible to kill it. My background in the industry came back actually when I was still on the farm. The other farmers tried to form cooperatives, and they did. They thought they would buy their gasoline wholesale, and then they would give the farmers a dividend for whatever

they could sell. Well they all went down the drain. The reason was because they were not big enough. What Imperial Oil would do is they would undersell that region that they serviced. Consequently, they went under. There was no dividend. They cut them, they ? for Imperial. But that's how they killed these things. That stuck in my mind when I worked in the Co-op refinery. They had farmers built, and it's a wonderful story. They mortgaged their land. The CPR wanted demerge payments before they ever took the crude off of the cars. They cut us out of Turner Valley crude. We had to go and look for it in the U.S. and ship it up. Everything they could do. The farmers mortgaged their land to get this refinery going. Its existence meant Imperial cut the price of a gallon of gasoline by 15 cents a gallon. That's a lot of money in those days. We still made enough money to pay for the plant in 2 years. They then went the other route of cutting us off of crude and so forth. The co-op had good people from worldwide organization to give the necessary skills in running the plant. When I got there, this was the environment that we lived in. It wasn't surprising to me that they would act that way, because our scope wasn't big enough.

I got elected as ? we formed the oil workers union. I think I told you about the beginning of it, when we got recognition for that. I was involved in first of all writing a paper for the employees. Then I became recording secretary. And of course, under the British system, which the Canadian Congress of

Labour was, the secretary really was the one that had the sway. The president was sort of the chair. That changed as we joined the international union. But in the U.S., president is a big name. I became the president, and the president then had the sway. Even though you had shop stewards and shop steward chairmen, the president was always involved. I used to sit the guys down and rehearse them what they had to say. So the employer called me aside one time. He says, why are you doing all this? You're doing such a good job, why are you doing it? I said, to tell you the truth I've never asked myself that question. I just feel that these fellows are entitled to a good defence, particularly when they're right. You made wrong decisions. I said, I remember that when I was a pumper after we got our first contract and there was a seniority clause in there, OB Mills came to me and said, Neil you're the best pumper we have. But I'm going to demote you and prove to the union that I don't have to recognize seniority. How naïve ? the union was at that time, I was still writing the paper and doing some research for them. They got as chairman to represent us the Deputy Minister of Labour. But the chairman they agreed to being the president of the wheat pool. So the boss won. I was demoted, and he proved his point. That he could demote a person who he personally told me I was the best pumper we had. He didn't correct it. But I said, you know, we're not going to put up with these games anymore if I've got anything to do with it. When it came to promotion, the new

manager recognized it and rectified things. I guess it was the satisfaction of getting the job done. My background was such that I naturally reacted to an injustice. Watching through the depression and that kind of thing. Never occurred to me that there was any other reason in doing that.

I think I told you about McCosland and him appointing me. Ya the first director. When the Canadian Congress of Labour was formed, we were all chartered locals of the congress that they had formed. There was no international or national union. They called us the United Oil Workers of Canada, which had the semblance of it. But we were still only a chartered local union. We were Local 1. The time came where the Canadian Congress of Labour invited international unions, just like the TLC had, to come into Canada. There was the steel workers and Charlie Millard. People who were part of the congress, all got to be heads of organizations. George Burt was with auto workers. Harvey Ladd was with wood workers. McCosland hadn't received anything. The packing house workers had one of the fellows too. They appointed him as head of the oil workers union. There was a condition from the international union that they would hire so many reps to come on staff. He felt it was going to be easy to organize. He would make one swing across the country, and people would come to the gates. But nobody came. He didn't know anything about the industry. As a matter of fact, when we joined the Oil Workers International Union, which had a very proud history,

they were one of the ones with John L. Lewis to form the CIO. He took too much alcohol, and embarrassed the union in a number of areas. In 1954 some big shenanigans in Chicago. The president accepted his resignation. The rank and file board and the board representative knew me very well. He says, look we've only got one guy organizing up there. Nobody's supposed to be able to organize in Alberta, and we have organized there. He's the only person that knows the industry. We're not going to go by seniority. The president wanted the senior guy, but the board wasn't going to go along with him. They'd had enough of this, there were other problems with the staff really. The guy from Quebec figured that the Americans loved to have an appendage up here because it gave them satisfaction just to know they had something in Canada. They never did much for the union. So he resigned and I got the call from the president. I was home alone. He said, I'm sitting around here and the board will vote unanimously to appoint you as director to fill McCosland's position, if you will accept. I said, do I have some time to think about it? He says, ya. I says, how long? He says, as along as I'm on this phone. It dawned on me then, if you say no you can't say yes afterwards. But if you say yes, you can say no afterwards. So I said yes. So I became the director. The talk was in Eastern Canada that this stubble jumper, they gave me 6 months longevity. But here we are after 60 years and I'm still here.

I think I would also like to tell you about the first organizing we did in Edmonton here. Maybe it's for nostalgic reasons I wanna tell one particular story. It was a lesson for me too, that unions had their shortcomings as well. Liquid Carbonic was one of those standard things, about 21 employees. They were the first. They were out there 121st st, somewhere in there. That gave me a voice in the labour council and the federation. I think I told you about my first federation meeting, where there was 35 of us. I got so well treated by all 17 on each side. I voted for Roy Jam, and that was beginning of his career. My second group what I did when I came to Edmonton, that's the only place in the world they could send me where I didn't know someone, I got a call right away from Denver from the vice president. He wanted to know how many people I'd signed up that week. McCosland, all the time I was a rep, never showed up here once. Nobody was there to explain the policies to me. Which I found to be good, because I'd have been hamstrung if I'd have known them. But they wouldn't give me any money at all in terms of establishing an office. There was a Al Seiben, who was an industrial building trades person from England. The house we lived in, it was built by them. They didn't have these jurisdictional disputes and whatnot. The tradesmen as they were developed here were sort of shoved to IBW and not into their organization. But they were very skilled people. Everything was just right down to square. So Al said to me, if I give you a

certain amount of money, I'll pay for it myself, can I share the office with you? Pay half of it for you. He says, sure he says, but we'll pay for the telephone. It was 422-7932 and I was sorry the union let that one go. Because it's got a lot of history to it with Al Seiben who's a wonderful trade unionist. I know he's dead, but who's got the history, but he's a fellow that should be remembered.

So I was at that office every Saturday. Guys would come downtown, their wives wanted to do shopping. We had a bunch of guys come to my office, and I was there every week. They brought other guys up to talk union and that kind of thing. But I never asked anyone to sign up. That was deliberate on my part, because if they ever want one they'd ask the question. And they did, of course. I said, I thought you guys would never ask. But the first guy that came was a fellow by the name of Ollie Nelson Wigger, an arctic explorer. He was a powerhouse engineer at Westin Bakeries, the one off Kingsway. He says, we want a union and we want your union. I says, just hang on for a minute. We've got very strong jurisdictional rules in the CCL. I'll come and look. Where are we gonna meet? He says, you come to the plant and I'll take you through the plant. If you come down the back way ? the powerhouse engineer. You've seen these pictures of sailors with one bad eye. He was a real character. He took me around. The guys were a little unusual, I thought. There was no real happiness to see me. Here's another

guy wants to do something for you. I found out they were all John Howard Society people. The union had certification for the plant that excluded them. I suppose convicts are supposed to pay the price forever and ever, even though they've spent their time in jail. They were the lowest paid in the plant. They were electricians, machinists, boiler house engineers. The girls making bread got more money then they did. It was a bakery and confectionary workers union. I wondered, how can a rep do that? But nevertheless, I made application for certification, and got certified. They wouldn't want to come with me to negotiate with the employer. I said, well I'm not going by myself. You guys have to be there, I need at least 2 guys. I drew up a contract. First I wanted to get the contract underway. I didn't want to put them on strike with that kind of wages that they were getting. We should be able to get something the first year that would satisfy them. So they came, and I found out the employer was afraid of them because they were convicts. We almost got everything we asked. He wanted them out of his office. So the next year we made them the highest paid people in the plant. Well talk about people who remembered. They became extremely loyal. They came through a ? because they made some mistake somewheres in life. I don't know one single thing they did and never asked. They were supposed to pay forever. So some union having done something for them was something they never forgot. But I told them when their congress

merged that we didn't have a jurisdiction and they would have go to the organization that they belonged. They didn't want to go. They literally cried to leave. But they did. I said this is the deal, this is what we agreed to. Because I felt I was going to be ridiculed in Ottawa. Here's an oil worker organizing bakery workers. Proud as I was of them. But I think I'd accomplished my mission, they got there. Let me tell you Dave, that for 20 years after, every xmas they always called me. They never forgot. It's something that you know you've done. That was my 2nd vote I had in the labour movement here. So that was my start.

Then the question was in CIL, Celanese was being built, gas plants all over the place. Brown and Root was tremendously anti-labour. The management of Celanese Corporation from the U.S. hadn't had anything organized in the world. So it was going to be a tough row. The Celanese unit, CIL was first, no …

I signed up most of them in British American Oil Refinery there. Even though we had almost 70% signed up, this government I knew all the time would have a vote, because of Manning's commitment that unions would not get started in industry. To make a long story short, we lost it by 10 votes. The interesting part was that the fellows who voted for the union quit the company, all in mass. The company didn't have enough men to run the refinery. So it got shut down as a result of their activities in that regard. But

they went to CIL and to Celanese. So I had a strong core. If somebody has been denied something, they become stronger supporters than what they were. Pat Garrepy, Lexmond.

CIL had competition. District 50 came. But we'd received the jurisdiction by a congress decision at a congress convention in Montreal.

[Tape 3b cont, side B]

… just with pure oil workers. Because it was too highly technical. There was huge production, but every year they required less and less employees. We used to have 17 refineries in this province. We've just got the 2, and they supply Saskatchewan, Manitoba and B.C. as well. So you see the technical – I was right on that. So I was bound to expand the jurisdiction. But I got a letter from McCosden just how stupid and dumb I was – these things can't be won. But I didn't give up. They made a mistake by having the first business convention in Montreal. I had Roy Jam all charged up. I went to all the labour councils and federations in the prairie provinces where District 50 wasn't know and not looked upon as a very capable union anyway. McCosland refused to let me go to the convention. They hit Montreal running. All that night they knew the resolution was going to come up first think in the morning. I don't think they went to bed, and they buttonholed

every delegate. So McCosland had to defend them with the brief that I presented to him. Sylvie Barret, who was a character and a wonderful guy, District 50, says the oil workers have hired a chemical engineer to prove that chemical isn't chemical. McCosland talked to them about the ships that he had were three thirds under water. So it was quite an exciting debate I guess, but we won it. It was carried in the press here, which had a very favourable message for us by the workers inside.

When the congress merger was made absolutely official, the mine workers pulled out of the congress. Maybe that was one of the reasons. However, my competition was District 50, the International Chemical Workers, and the Gas Coke and Chemical.

Ya that was Sylvie Barret, they had the chemical jurisdiction.

Well they were all handing out leaflets. They had their strength in the yarn division, I had it in the petrochemicals because of these guys at deft. Of course they understood, a lot of them came to my Saturday morning meetings as well. One day, and as you know, the International Chemical Workers Union was really established as an anti-communist organization. They had what they called the company union in there, the joint industrial council. So one day they hand out a leaflet calling the people in the joint industrial council communists. Well you should have seen the reaction. I put out my only leaflet that I put out, I said you had a choice to make. Here's our

program. We don't call names, you're a trade unionist, you're a trade unionist. So they called meetings and we had organized CIL. Celanese covers a section of land, so the people don't know each other. So I made sure enough of our people from CIL were at the meeting too. I didn't go, but Roy Jamma was there. He would run to the phone and say, what do we say now? So they voted to give us a hearing. I remember that. They were going to meet with me. Buck Filt was there, and a fellow by the name of Shallene. Roy picked me up at the airport, it was still downtown. These fellows were having their meeting. They asked questions and some of them were tough questions. The average age in the plant was 27. The guys had a job that paid more than they'd earned in their lives. But they weren't going to have this business of being called a communist. They made me promise that I wouldn't ask for a wage increase the first year. I says, somehow or other, I think the employer and you can get it on. The employer won't fight that position. But they wanted a union. So they all signed up. They needed grievances, they needed all those other things they said. But they're making more money than they ever have before. That appetite for not a wage increase didn't last very long. So we had the vote and we won it.

CIL was another matter. The other company won a District 50 because they had District 50 across the country. However, we had some people 25 years service with CIL and nobody can fire them. Once they're 25 year service,

they're not fireable. So they took the lead for us, because they were tired of the District 50 approach. We won the vote there as well. That was a real good start to organize the industry. With that kind of record is the reason I was appointed as director of the union. That was a start.

With the Canadian Labour Congress it was a little different. I knew that with less than 1,000 people, well we now would have more because there are about 800 between the 2 plants. But that numbers count in the labour movement. I was amazed how little easterners knew about the west. Saskatchewan was the base on which I could build. Nobody was interested in organizing anything in Saskatchewan. Eventually there was the refineries, 3 or 4 of them, which we all organized. The sodium sulphate plants, the power corporation, all the ones that were there. So Saskatchewan became our base. Once in the labour movement you have a dominant voice in a province, you're starting to mean something. That is of course where we got into some difficulty with Tommy Douglas and the CCF. Or they got in difficulty with us, whichever way you wanna put it. It was really the forerunner to the establishment of the NDP in my view. When you had a dispute in Sask with the government, everybody in eastern Canada was down your neck. How could you possibly have a dispute with a guy as wonderful as Tommy Douglas. Well Tommy Douglas was a boxer, and he was a pugilist all his life. I have great affection for him, I respect him

greatly. But he had his warts too, and nobody wants to talk about him. But I think when you talk about him it makes a person more human. Nobody's perfect. I don't know why they want to go down that road right now. But we had the jurisdiction. It was the first attempt, first notice that I had of going to the CIO final convention in Las Angeles. Well I tell you, I was so excited. Here was John L. Lewis, Pat Conroy was going to be there. All the leading people that I've read about in the labour movement in the U.S. were going to be there. I went there not really understanding why the president appointed me as a delegate representing American workers, because obviously the Canadian Labour Congress. But he wanted me there. They didn't care whether you have a vote or not anyway. I crossed into Seattle. This is my first trip as a union leader into the U.S. The guys asked me, who do you work for? I said, the Oil Workers International Union. Where were you born? The Soviet Union. Did you ever work for a cooperative? Yes, for 10 years. Step aside. So they looked through mug books. They questioned me long enough that I missed my plane. They would ask the same question over and over again. When you go to the CIO convention, what will you do? I said, well I'm a delegate. What will you really do? I said, well if you really must know, I'm there to ?? president. I was getting a little irritated, but not so much that they'd send me back. So finally looking through the mugs books, I said you're not going to find my name in there. I've never been arrested or

questioned like this in my life. But it was the McCarthy era. I imagine it was '56, '55 or '56. So when I went to the convention, the person who impressed me most was Eleanor Rosevelt. She's not good looking. I wasn't going to say ugly, but she's just absolutely not a good looking woman. But she's that way so much that she was beautiful. Her presentations and meeting her, she impressed me as being a very genuine person. I wouldn't be surprised that FDR gets a lot of credit that he belongs to her. But that's the way life is. But the rest of the convention was dead as doornails. I thought these people would go up and debate some major issues. It wasn't. I came back and expressed my disappointment to Howard Conkerhood, who was the congress educational person. He was actually the best adult educationist in Ontario, if not in Canada. He said, Neil I'll tell you something. What you saw, you saw mass psychology. For every 10 people you have a leader, 30 you might have a challenger. The more people there are, the lower the common denominator. He says, those leaders fall into that same category as anybody else. He says, I'll give you a one-year university course in 5 minutes. If there's 10 people, you find a leader, 30 there's a challenge. But if you take 100 and divide them into 10, each one of them selects their leader, and they put them all together, those 10 will choose one. It's pretty true, when you think of the demographics in your own life experience. He says, that's what's happened if you're at a CIO convention. I had to accept his explanation because they'd

already got together on their executive council and had agreed. No use having a debate. So where do we go from here?